

Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

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Approaches to Lifelong in Faith Formation

- 3 Worship as a Model for Faith Formation
 Anne E. Streaty Wimberly

 Reflection Guide
 Recommended Resources
- 16 Passing on Faith—Milestone to Milestone
 Linda Staats

 Reflection Guide
 Recommended Resources
- 30 Total Community Catechesis for Lifelong Faith Formation
 Thomas Groome
- 40 Lifelong Faith Formation for All Generations
 John Roberto

 Practice Ideas
 Recommended Resources
- 53 The Emerging Vision of Lifelong Faith Formation in the Catholic Church
 Bill Huebsch

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Welcome to the beginning of our second year of publishing *Lifelong Faith*. In our first year we explored faith formation with life cycle groups and families; conducted a review of the research on best practices in faith formation. Our second year will devote issues to approaches in lifelong faith formation, faith formation in Christian practices, contemporary approaches to teaching for discipleship, and emerging issues in faith formation.

This issue of **Lifelong Faith** explores approaches to lifelong faith formation—ways to conceptualize and implement faith formation across the whole life span. **Anne E. Streaty Wimberly** in “Worship as a Model for Faith Formation” writes that worship “teaches” us in a powerful way whose we are and that worship serves as an essential pathway through which we are nourished and fashioned as a people of God.” **Linda Staats** in “Passing on Faith Milestone to Milestone” presents a model of faith formation fashioned around the personal, family, and congregational milestones that occur throughout life. **Thomas Groome** in “Total Community Catechesis for Lifelong Faith Formation” presents a holistic model that envisions an intentional coalition of parish, family, and programs/school that engages every member and all aspects of each unit, by and for people of all ages, teaching and learning together for *total* Christian faith toward God’s reign in the world. **Bill Huebsch** in “The Emerging Vision of Lifelong Faith Formation in the Catholic Church” describes significant developments in the emergence of lifelong faith formation as a priority in the Catholic Church. My article, “Lifelong Faith Formation for All Generations” summarizes the foundational insights of the Generations of Faith approach I developed.

This issue is designed to be used with church staffs, leadership teams, and faith formation leaders as your congregation envisions and implements lifelong faith formation. You can purchase additional copies for \$8 plus shipping (quantity discounts available.) I hope you find this issue informative and helpful to your whole church. Please let me know what you think by sending me your comments at jroberto@lifelongfaith.com.

John Roberto, Editor

P.S. Be sure to go to www.lifelongfaith.com for information about our programs and services, for free resources on lifelong faith formation, and to sign up for the free **Lifelong Faith E-Newsletter**.

Lifelong Faith

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Next Issue

Summer 2008
**Faith Formation in
Christian Practices**



Worship as a Model for Faith Formation

Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, Ph.D.

Christian nurture has its foundation in public worship. Other ministries find their inspiration in worship. (Segler and Bradley 78)

At the beginning of a Sunday morning worship service I attended, an elderly layperson invited the congregation into a prayer of preparation that went something like this: *Good morning, God! We thank you for welcoming us here and offering us this time together with you. We come before you with gratitude for who you are and whose we are. We also enter with fervent prayers and weeping hearts for the loss of life and homes by fire in California; for ground-soaking rain heaped upon unresolved devastation in New Orleans. We come with pain deep in our souls for war in the Middle East and rumors of war in other places, and for reminders of starving brothers and sisters around this world we all call our earthly home. We come with heartfelt knowing that sickness, sorrow, and adversity abide among us here. We all stand in need of prayer this morning. And yet, we acknowledge the blessing of being awakened this morning to see the light of day.*

We are blessed with measures of health and strength, food and clothing sufficient to bring us here, and with both love and goods we can share with those in need. We are blessed by love shown to us in the smiles of the ushers and the touch of a neighbor's hand. We are blessed by victories won, and yes, by hope that shines along the sometimes darkened path we call life. We are blessed with the opportunity to offer food and care to someone in need and a visit to some among us who are homebound or in prison. We draw nigh this morning to a present God from whom all blessings come, and to this same God who knows all about our troubles and the needs and cares of the world, and will be with us to the end.

We ask, God, that this morning, you take a personal seat beside each one of us and whisper in our ears renewed words of life. Place in our hands the mustard seed to plant in our gardens of life, and give us a glimpse of how to plant it wisely so that our lives may grow worthy of your calling. Most especially, open our hearts to receive what you have for us during this time of worship that would create in us a never dying faith in you and zeal to serve the present age.

We pray this prayer to you, God, in the name of Jesus our brother, who before us experienced the storms of life; our example of how to keep on keeping on; our guide when we don't know which way to turn; our sustainer who props us up on every leaning side and causes us to shout, "Glory!" when the tears of the night turn to joy in the morning; and our redeemer who, if we but let him, makes of us your servants on behalf of your people. Let us, the people of God say, "Amen!" Amen.

Anne E. Streaty Wimberly Ph.D. is Professor of Christian Education at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and serves as Program Director for the Youth Hope-Builders Academy. She is the author of *Nurturing Faith & Hope—Black Worship as a Model for Christian Education and Soul Stories—African American Christian Education*, and co-author of *In Search of Wisdom—Faith Formation in the Black Church*.

This prayer of a seasoned worshiper points to a profound insight about the nature of worship and its ritual elements called liturgy, which we understand to be the work of the people. This insight is that worship “teaches” us in a powerful way *whose* we are even as we offer our prayers. In the elder’s prayer, we grasp an experiential knowing of prayer as an intimate conversation with an already present, living, and personal God. We discover a presence before whom the circumstances of life can be laid and through whom we can imagine a sojourn of faithful and hope-filled response to God with the guidance of Jesus. It serves as an essential pathway through which we were nourished and fashioned as a people of God.

Of course, it is not simply prayer that serves as a Christian educational pathway in worship. All of worship “gathers, forms, and feeds the people of God” (Newman, 14). Indeed, worship is a vital educational ministry event, nourishing resource, and significant means by which we come to know God, ourselves, and the nature of the Christian journey more fully. In what follows, fuller attention will be given to meanings of worship as Christian education. In addition, we will consider worship as God-referenced and life-directed education, and key pathways and events through which Christian education takes place in worship, including the role of the pastor. The final section will contain some concluding remarks and an invitation to reflect on the future of worship as a model for Christian education.

I. Meanings of Worship as Christian Education

When Christians say we are going to church to worship, we typically mean that we are going to a service of worship. Worship names the Sabbath gathering of Christians. This worship of the church is the *leitourgia*, or the “action of the people,” which is understood as the service Christians render to God. It is a place where we enter into conscious communion with God and honor God, an experience of celebration and appreciation of what God has done, and a time of making offerings of selves, feelings, attitudes, and gifts to God. It may also be a time of lament to God. It is an adventure in reality in which personal need and desire are placed before God and the self in Christ is sought (Segler and Bradley, 6-11). It is considered, as well, to be “the dangerous act of waking up to God and to the purposes of God in the world, and then living lives

...worship is a primary experience not simply of coming before God, but as a time of disclosing to new and continuing worshipers and ongoing generations understandings of worship, faith, and life. Worship as Christian education may be seen as edification, formation, and nurture.

that actually show it” (Labberton, 3). But one of its purposes is also Christian education.

In the book *Nurturing Faith and Hope*, I make the point that the Christian educational role of worship is not new. Historically, worship served as an important experience through which teaching and learning the Christian story and its meaning for Christian life occurred (Wimberly 2004, xi). As early as the second to the sixth centuries, the Jerusalem church’s liturgy served as a catechizing and deeply formational process. The liturgy formed the catechumens—those preparing for baptism—and the already baptized as they gathered together, processed from holy places while singing hymns, reenacted events of Jesus’ life, lighted candles, heard narrations of the gospels, engaged in varying forms of blessing, and were dismissed after receiving the announcement of the next gathering. Through these worship practices, the catechumens prepared for more formal periods of instruction; but, together with the baptized, they were experientially formed in the gospel by walking the path of discipleship (Astley, 244; Benedict Jr., 64).

The importance of the Christian educational role in current day worship built on the convincing arguments of leaders who emphasized every aspect of the church’s life, including worship, as contributive of the formation of Christians.¹ The Christian educational function of worship also gained momentum from reports of the need for a revitalized sense of educational ministry that could not be satisfied in church school. This view connected with findings of the diminishing effectiveness of intentionally planned Christian education experiences and renewed recognition of this role of worship (Carr, 35; Roehlkepartain, 12).²

Of all the meetings held in the life of the congregation, worship remains the heart of

congregational life and typically involves the largest gathering of people, with more people attending than in church school. Although we know that it must in no way be a substitute for planned systematic forms of education, worship is a primary experience not simply of coming before God, but as a time of disclosing to new and continuing worshipers and ongoing generations understandings of worship, faith, and life. We may understand what this model of worship means in at least three ways. Worship as Christian education may be seen as edification, formation, and nurture.

Edification

Franklin Segler and Randall Bradley highlight edification as a purpose of worship by reminding us that “it is wrong to base the necessity of worship on its usefulness, but it is equally wrong not to keep in mind the usefulness of worship for the individual worshiper.” For them, the key to building up the body of Christ is building up the individual (Segler and Bradley, 78). They go on to say: “Edification means the building up of the individual—the mind through instruction, perception, and discernment; the emotions through the energizing interpersonal relationships; the conscience through the sensitizing power of God’s Spirit; and the will in its motivation to action” (Segler and Bradley, 78).

Marva Dawn emphasizes that for worship to be edifying, it must be thought provoking. Specifically, “it should stir new thoughts about God—new insights into God’s character” (Dawn, 249). The intent is for persons’ character to be transformed. Thought-provoking, edifying worship keeps God as the subject, builds us up spiritually and morally, establishes us in the faith, and roots us in sound doctrine to the end that we form new attitudes, new petitions and intercessions, and new behaviors. Thought-provoking, edifying worship is for the sake of believers’ character formation (Dawn, 248-249).

Formation

Worship is about God’s calling us and forming us to be a community of character after the pattern of Jesus Christ, and transforms us to the end that this character is lived faithfully in the world. God’s forming and transforming activity through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit comes to us through distinctive experiences of worship. Liturgy forms the Christian community by our engagement in liturgical practices. Formation happens through prayers that model conversations with God and shape our own. Worship passes on to us biblical stories, rituals, arts, signs and symbols through which we encounter God,

form understandings of our religious heritage, and shape memories that sustain us in times of crisis. In its repetition, liturgy holds potential for forming in us a new and dynamic appreciation for God’s activity in and beyond worship (Dawn, 139; White, 21-28; Benedict Jr., 25).

Nurture

Christian education through worship that is described as nurturing experience centers on spiritual nourishment that feeds and builds-up worshipers’ seeing and taking into our minds, souls, and spirits the nature of God that prompts our response to God. From this standpoint, nurture that takes place through worship is *evocative*. It is to arouse in us a new or renewed understanding of who God is, who we are in relation to God, and how we should live in response to God. As an evocative nurturing experience, then, worship is to “fill us” with and invite our “digestion” by way of critical reflection on what constitutes the nature of God known in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, a valued identity, and the journey away from sin to salvation. Moreover, it is to stimulate our creation of insights on what these themes mean for our lives (Wimberly 2004, xx).

Nurture is further described as an experience in worship that

draws on and stimulates our thinking selves...[and] is also to arouse our deep feelings in response to what is evoked within us...[It] is to bring forth our passionate embrace of what faith and hope mean to us and a zest for acting on both. Indeed, this arousal of emotion may move us to contemplative homage to God or to the point of clapping, shouting, dancing, or exclaiming “Amen!” “Hallelujah!” or “Say it! That’s the truth!” (Wimberly 2004, xx)

Evocative nurture in worship brings us to God; at the same time, it reminds us of our everyday stories as well as the realities of life. The opening prayer pointed to some of the troubles of our day and the struggles of individuals. Evocative nurture in worship also calls to mind the deep questions of life: “Why and in whom shall we have faith? How can we count on what appears to be an evanescent God who does not appear to be good all the time and who seems to do bad things to good people? What hope is there for life?” The “stuff” and the “messiness” of life and the need and desire for answers have a way of entering with us and arising in the midst of worship and cannot be ignored. Persons seek through worship the connection between their everyday experiences of life and the authentic story of God’s self-communication amidst the realities of life. They seek a weaving of the

human and divine narratives in ways they can discern through life's Christian journey of service to God and its "darkness by faith that 'always sees a star of hope'" (Wimberly 2004, xiii).³

Worship passes on to us
biblical stories, rituals, arts, signs and symbols through which we encounter God, form understandings of our religious heritage, and shape memories that sustain us in times of crisis. In its repetition, liturgy holds potential for forming in us a new and dynamic appreciation for God's activity in and beyond worship.

When this happens, we are enabled to make sense out of our lives and are formed and sustained in a faith that carries us beyond Sunday into the unfolding days of the journey of life. Or, as Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley put it: "[T]he myth of Sunday requires the parable of Monday; the proclamation of the divine story requires its integration with real human stories; and the public display of Sunday services demands attention to the cares of every life if it is to be a transforming ritual moment" (Anderson and Foley, 161). Indeed, they insist that "without weaving the human and the divine narratives into a single web, it is unlikely that any Christian community of faith can survive" (Anderson and Foley, 157).

So, what is the nature of the human narrative persons bring into worship, and how may worship connect the human and divine narrative in ways that equip us to live faithfully and with hope? We will now turn to some responses to the question.

II. God-Referenced and Life-Directed Education

Everyone has a story that is remembered, lived in the present, and anticipated. We do not check this truth of our being at the door of the place of worship. Within and across our ages/stages, we are apt to enter worship with reasons for celebration, cause for concern, or a combination of the two that evolve from the very real stories of our everyday lives. The

themes of our stories are integral parts of the faith formation process and become implicit in the role of edification and nurture in worship. Because we bring our stories into worship, celebrate God's dealing with us and our stories, and seek guidance and answers to questions arising in them, worship becomes both God-referenced and life-directed education. In *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, I describe six interrelated story themes: identity, socio-cultural contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings, and our unfolding story plot.

Identity

As we move through our lives and relate to the world around us, we form perceptions about who we are and whether the self we perceive is acceptable, worthy, lovable, and loved by others and God. On this basis, we may bring with us into congregational worship an affirming sense of our identity: a love of self and knowing God's love of us that we connect consciously or unconsciously with our daily experiences. Or, we may come struggling with the question, "Who am I? Am I of any value?" that is shaped by what has happened to us along our life's journey. Especially in this case, we enter worship longing for an experience of God's love. We seek an inner surety of our human value and our knowing deeply God's value of us. This search opens us to a response from God in worship and to education that invites us to review the divine-human relationship, God's purposes for our lives, and ways of carrying out these purposes.

We seek in worship nurture that engages us in reflective activity that challenges self-deprecation that is antithetical to God's view, and that evokes a re-framed view of a valued sense of self with dispositions such as strength and character necessary to carry out God's purposes for our lives (Wimberly 2004, 60-76; Wimberly 2005, 27, 37-38). Moreover, worship as a model for Christian education "places us into the story of God's people and stirs our sense of belonging to a continuing fellowship that stretches throughout time and space" (Dawn, 256).

Socio-Cultural Context

All of us have stories about where we live and the impact of our social location and nature of these places on our sense of comfort or discomfort and on who we perceive ourselves to be. We may experience the context in which we live as a place of status and safety, or a place as home no matter how humble, and the neighborhood as an area of belonging. Or, we may have immense concern and even fear about our

living environment that is compounded by a seeming inability to do something about it. Some may say that our social-cultural contexts have no bearing on what we bring to or expect in worship. But the questions, “Where is God in my home, my community or even the world?” or “Where is my help?” or “What does God expect of us in our own localities and in other settings?” are relevant questions in the hearts of those who come with them, and of those who don’t. If answered, the way opens for a faith that stimulates a new view and purposeful action where we are and where we need to be to make a difference in the lives of others (Wimberly 2005, 27, 38).

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are the associations and connections we make with other people, including family members, extended family, friends, colleagues in the workplace or school, persons in church and other religious, social, political, or medical institutions. Some of our greatest challenges in our everyday stories occur within this web of relationships. Of course, there are relationships we deem as liberating. But there are others that may be experienced as stifling or even paralyzing. Especially in the midst of difficult relationships, we seek the wisdom of God and wise counsel of others to show us the way. Worship becomes a place where this search is undertaken (Wimberly 2005, 28, 59-60).

Life Events

Our stories are informed by life events taking place in our social world and emerging out of our everyday relationships. They consist of positive and negative incidents. They include crises such as illness, hospitalization, disabling conditions, death, unfair treatment, broken relationships, job loss, and homelessness. But, they also include positive incidences like gratifying memories, mended relationships, life-changing religious experiences, and re-unions. Included as well are incidents that are associated with the ages/stages of our lives such as marriage, childbirth, school graduations, separation, divorce, becoming orphaned or widowed, and entering into or retiring from a chosen vocation (Wimberly 2005, 28, 60-61).

We bring into worship exhilarating feelings that attend positive life events and for which we want to give thanks to God. But, we also bring our concerns, lament, and questions about troubling life events. Questions that are carried within may include: “Why has this happened to me? Where was or is God? What am I to do?” Worship as a model for Christian

education does not evade the deep and honest questions about the very real events of our lives. Christian education as nurture is meant to bring forth our knowing the content of the faith and hope we are to embrace, and to evoke in us an understanding of faith and hope as more than nouns, but rather, as verbs that form within us a consciousness that God has not forsaken us.

Life Meanings

As we go about our everyday lives, we assign meanings—both positive and negative—to what we do, what happens to us, and what is occurring in the world, both near and afar. In meaning-making we think deeply and form opinions about every aspect of our daily lives—our identities, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, and life events; and we ponder and make judgments about the conditions in the world that inform the quality and potential of our own and others present life and future survival. In our meaning-making, we are attempting to bring order and purpose in our lives. It is our way of saying, “At this point in time, this is how I see life and my place in it” (Wimberly 2005, 28, 81-82). At this point, we may say, for example, “OK, life is good, yet not perfect. Nor do I expect it to be perfect. Yet, I am content.” Or, we may say, “I’m really not sure about this thing called life with all its trials and tribulations. I’m having a hard time holding onto happiness and purpose.” We may also say: “This is what I’m going to do about it, or what God has in mind for me to do.” But in meaning-making, the thought may arise: “I don’t know how I am going to make it to tomorrow, or survive until next week. I keep waiting on God, but God appears to be silent.”

When worship engages us in the stories and habits of the faith, it offers faith resources from which to look critically and interpret the lives we live. This role of worship becomes that of “teaching” a way of meaning-making by engaging worshipers, many of whom today did not grow up in Christian homes, the ritual prayers, hearing and reading biblical narratives and passages, confession, words of assurance and hope, communion, baptism, and welcoming fellowship. Through this role, worship creates a necessary and powerful link with God’s story, a way of hearing God’s voice, and discernment of direction on life’s unfolding journey.

Our Unfolding Story Plot

The meanings we assign to our lives inform how we act on life. Likewise, how we choose to act on life contributes to how our lives unfold. This makes up our unfolding story plot. As Christians, we choose to be linked with or set our life direction based on a Christian story plot, which is one patterned after the life of Jesus Christ. This plot is guided by love of God, self, and others, and by our vocation of living our lives in response to God's calling to be Jesus' disciples who serve and contribute to the well-being of others.

There are at least three dominant pathways of Christian education in worship including preaching, prayer, and music. In addition, I identify baptism and Holy Communion or the Eucharist as primary nurturing events. These pathways and events bring us into the presence of God, who is already there.

Of course, the reality is that the embrace of a plot centered on Christian discipleship is not that easy to fulfill in today's individualistic, competitive, and material-oriented society, where the importance of status has created enormous anxiety. Neither is it always deemed easy by those in situations where life's meaning has waned. Rather than saying: "I know that I'm headed in the right direction." Or, "I have some clues about the direction of my life and what God has in mind for me to do," the response is sometimes: "I don't know how I am going to make it to tomorrow, much less survive until next week. The future? I don't see it! I keep waiting on God, but God is absent." When assailed by secularizing culture and trials and tribulations, "there is the temptation to succumb to an approach in life that says, 'Life is a horrid mistake.' Or 'Life is a barrel of lemons out of which no lemonade can possibly be made'" (Wimberly 2005, 82). Yet, even in the bleakest circumstance, those who enter worship and others who are un-churched, have a quest to know how their sojourn may become one of faith and hope. Even those whose sojourn is set in a positive direction desire new and renewed revelation of God's active involvement and assurance that the direction is right.

The worshipers' quest is for what Stephen Carter calls "the serenity of a person who is confident in the knowledge that he or she is living rightly" (Carter 1996, 7). Or stated another way, worshipers are looking for—yes, needing—what can take them beyond the ambiguities and messiness of life and give them integrity and courage to live life based on an unyielding faith in God (Wimberly 2002, 12). It is, in fact, a search for both faith and hope.

III. Key Pathways and Events of Christian Education in Worship

There are at least three dominant pathways of Christian education in worship including preaching, prayer, and music. In addition, I identify baptism and Holy Communion or the Eucharist as primary nurturing events. These pathways and events bring us into the presence of God, who is already there. Or we might say that, because we are participants in these aspects of liturgy, to use the words of Daniel Benedict Jr., "we carry one another into the Presence" (Benedict Jr. 2007, 25). These pathways and events inform us about and form in us a surety of the story of God's relationship with us through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. But more than this, they are means of nourishing our faith—our belief or trust—in this relationship and an alive hope—expectation and will—to live life confidently and courageously after the model of Jesus, in times of triumph and trials and through self-sacrificing service in the world. In what follows, brief attention will be given to the pathways of Christian education and to the events of baptism and Eucharist.

Preaching, Prayer, and Music

Worship invites us into preaching, prayer, and music. These pathways are central means of entering into praise of God, the story of God proclaimed in Scripture, and our own stories. These same pathways engage us in and teach about celebrations of the high seasons of Christmas and Easter, and special celebrations and responses to crises. Through these pathways, we hear and participate in the announcement of the good news. But we also enter into these pathways with the questions already posed above, plus other piercing ones: "So what? What does this mean for my life? Is this something new in the telling of this story? What will these experiences of worship tell me that I don't already know? What preexistent or new truths borne out by

personal experience will be corroborated by the experience of worship?" (Stewart, 68).

Through these pathways, worship invites us to address our search for belief. They become avenues not simply of religious expression, but of answers to a quest for religious answers. But, as Chittister reminds us: "When it is at its best, religion offers more than a list of answers designed to resolve the unanswerable; it tenders a way to deal with the questions that plague our lives and puzzle hearts" (Chittister, 2).

Preaching and the Role of the Pastor as Christian Educator

In worship, the pastor becomes a pivotal educator in worship who serves as a key translator of the nature and activity of God, and what God's relationship with us means. The sermon is a pivotal pathway for our discerning what it means to live courageously in the present and move forward with confidence. Indeed, an important function of the sermon is to be an evocative trigger that motivates Christians to live faith-full and hope-filled lives after the model of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, says James Harris, the pastor as educator "is compelled to say something that addresses the needs of the people, directing the message to heart and head" (Harris, 56). For Christian worship to connect with our everyday stories is for the pastor to see him or herself as Christian educator and nurturing presence with a style of communication that is relational, practical, specific, and intended to have evocative power. In *Nurturing Faith and Hope*, I make the point that, in the Black church, this style is carried out through three primary preaching functions: prophetic, priestly, and apostolic.

The *prophetic* function centers on the preacher evoking the worshipers' vision of hope in the midst of the chaotic journey of life. The intent is to bring about a heightened awareness of the meaning of a lived faith in God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and an existence that exemplifies it. This kind of sermon may be called a "homiletic of protest" in that invites the worshipers' critical internal assessment of and attentiveness to attitudes and behaviors that block their abilities to act on behalf of their own and others' well-being. The intent is the worshipers' formation of a faith- and hope-centered prophetic spirituality, by clarifying specific behaviors or action that are needed to address identity devaluating, self-defeating, and life negating circumstances. In short, through this function, the preacher becomes a "teacher prophet" who presents a biblical basis for faith- and hope-centered

prophetic spirituality, invites worshipers into a critique of behavior, and then challenges them to carry out the agenda of God made known in Jesus Christ (Wimberly 2004, 133-130).

The *priestly* function of preaching centers on attention to the worshipers' identity formation, views of life, and coping strategies amid the fray of life. Also called "uplift education," or "a homiletic of emancipatory uplift," this kind of preaching centers on faith in God's activity on behalf of persons' release *from* the things that block their journey forward *to* their envisioning and moving toward a future of promise. The preacher invites worshipers' self-examination, evokes deepening self-understanding, and nurtures their valued identity that is given by God and lived out in community. The intent is to evoke worshipers' view that life need not be purposeless or hopeless, and to engender in the worshipers a vision of Christian vocation and specific life skills that are critical to life in families, communities, and the world even when their "backs are against the wall" (Wimberly 2004, 139-141).

The *apostolic* function of preaching focuses on the pastor's authentic modeling of the faith and hope about which he or she preaches. Central to this authenticity is the requirement that the preacher is a listening presence with others in order to grasp who they are and the nature of their stories, a compassionate responder to the existential conditions of people's lives, and a witness to the gospel that "teaches" through the very life the preacher lives (Wimberly 2004, 141-143).

Prayer as a Christian Educational Pathway

In *Nurturing Faith and Hope*, I draw on Ann and Barry Ulanov's view of prayer to describe it as "'primary speech' or the natural expression of the whole self and the connected community to a faithful God and a God of promise to whom every desire and cry for help may be presented" (Wimberly 2004, 157; Ulanov, 1982, 1). But I add that prayer is activity through which we become aware experientially of a model of conversations with God, practice the vocabulary of prayer, and form our own soul's language with which we enter conversations with God (Wimberly 2004, 157).

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian educational endeavor in worship through the manner in which it serves as validating language of who God is and how God acts. Through the language of prayer in worship, we learn and validate who God is and how God acts. We become aware of and validate the nature and importance of the divine-human relationship. We discover and validate the self-disclosive functions of prayer by hearing and

participating in very real, spontaneous, and autobiographical prayers. These prayers answer the question: “What are we allowed to say about our experiences and innermost thoughts and feelings in our conversations with God?” In addition, our experiences of and participation in prayers in worship not simply “teach us” the nature of but help us to express laments, confessions, intercessions, and commitments to God (Wimberly 2004, 161-162).

Music as a Christian Educational Pathway

Music in worship may be described as an artful teaching and nurturing activity. It

draws the whole congregation into an imaginative, freely expressed style of evoking views, attitudes, and feelings about the beliefs we hold or are forming....In words and emotion beyond ordinary language, songs tell our communities’ stories of faith and hope in God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the valued self, and the movement from sin to salvation. Songs challenge us, too, to consider what these themes have to say for our everyday lives as Christians and to decide how we will sojourn as faithful and hope-filled followers of Jesus Christ. (Wimberly 2004, 147)

And, songs serve as teaching and nurturing agents in the liturgical events of baptism and Holy Communion.

There is also a concern that must be raised with regard to music in contemporary worship. That concern regards *choice*. The importance and power of music in worship is so great that the issue of choice requires those who plan worship to ask the question: “How may nurturing faith and hope through music be an inclusive experience?”

Baptism and Holy Communion

The rituals of baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist) became two central rites of Christian worship during New Testament times, and they continue as such today. Of the two, Christian baptism, which is patterned after the baptism of Jesus and connected to discipleship in the Great Commission, conveys something of “the more” that constitutes Christian faith and life. As one Black worshiper put it:

There is just something that happens at a baptism of an infant or an adult that makes me want to shout. Baptisms remind me that God is still alive and that we are important to God. Baptisms point to the promise there is for us in the difficult world in which we live when we have a relationship with God and the person of Jesus Christ. Really, in baptism,

we become new beings and we are set in a new direction in life to do what we can as Christians to make a better world. That’s good news!

We internalize and form meanings of the richness and depth of the communal celebration of baptism based on observation, the ritual language, music and symbols of fount and water, and on manners in which the baptism is done and the community participates. The intention is that, through these means, newly baptized individuals and the community learns that:

- Baptism is God’s welcoming action and the linking of the newly baptized with Christ, as well as a renewed uniting of the community with Christ.
- The community’s role is to welcome the newly baptized individual. It is not the experience of the baptized individual alone.
- The profession of faith of baptism initiates is not simply their own. They join a communal profession of faith that includes the universal or ever present church.
- Baptism is not a private affair between God and the newly baptized individual! The whole community becomes responsible for the nurture of the newly baptized individual and mutually responsible for one another.
- Baptism is an event and a sojourn undertaken by the baptized individual with God and with companions and mentors who are on the path of Christian discipleship.
- Baptism is a high moment in the Christian formation process and a step in the storied journey of everyday life with all its triumphs and struggles, yet sustained by God’s love, guided by Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit even when we seem unsure and unaware of them.
- Repeated communal experiences of the rite stimulate familiarity, understanding, and meaning (Benedict Jr., 94-101; Wimberly 2004, 105-116).

Holy Communion, or the Eucharist (a thanksgiving), is a communal experience of remembering the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples. But in a very profound way, it is an experience of *re-membering* community or of the community’s being and becoming anew a united people of character after the model of Jesus Christ, and of the expression of Christian character and hospitality in the church and world. Because of the centrality emphasis on hospitality, Holy Communion is called “the welcome table.”

We can no longer assume that all participants in our places of worship have grown up in a Christian home. Nor can we assume that those who come will participate in systematic and intentionally planned Christian education programs in spite of our best efforts to make this happen. The worshiping congregation will likely continue to be a primary and fertile context for edification, formation, and nurture.

As in baptism, we gain an interior understanding of the welcome table to which Jesus invites us through what is observed, the ritual language, music, symbols of bread and wine (or grape juice), and manners in which the ritual is done and the community partakes. The intent is for the community to learn that doing it in remembrance of Jesus means recognizing Jesus' relational and sacrificial caring. In this way, we experience it as thanksgiving for the abundance of love and blessing of this care. But we are also to learn that doing it in remembrance of Jesus means recognizing Jesus' willingness to sojourn in spite of disappointment and suffering on behalf of the well-being of others. In this way, we learn that the meal is prepared and served in what Benedict Jr. calls "sorrow's kitchen." In this way, we get in touch with today's realities and the responsibility that is ours in the forward journey from death to life in troubled regions of the world, in the lives of starving people in the global village, in the suffering of the poor and homeless in our cities, in the abuse of children, in the care of the elderly, the sick, and the imprisoned among us (Benedict Jr., 114-115).

It is also the case that we come to understand Holy Communion as the welcome table because it kindles worshippers' recognition and experience of a communal "home" in a society that does not feel like home to them. In this instance, the welcome table personifies a home for people who experience a sense of homelessness in the everyday sojourn of life. And as a nurturing event, it prompts these persons' recognition of Jesus Christ as the host who welcomes homeless sojourners, offering them a shelter in the time of storm and spiritual food—the all-important Bread of Life—for the journey ahead. In this case,

Holy Communion is joyous celebration. Yet it does not cancel the important learning that the responsibility of the Christian disciple is to care for others within and beyond the congregation (Wimberly 2004, 121-122).

IV. Conclusions and Invitation to Reflect

We can no longer assume that all participants in our places of worship have grown up in a Christian home. Nor can we assume that those who come will participate in systematic and intentionally planned Christian education programs in spite of our best efforts to make this happen. The worshiping congregation will likely continue to be a primary and fertile context for edification, formation, and nurture. It will be necessary to see the continuing importance of this role of worship, plan for it, and make it come alive in ways that enrich God-referenced and life-directed worship, Christian character formation, and discipleship. But, how do we do it?

In our post-modern age, attempts are being made to reach new and potential worshippers by reforming the style of worship. Reform has resulted in criticisms of secularized worship, entertainment, self-fulfillment practices, and a community's celebration of itself. The trend has had the effect of creating "wars" between generations, separate worship services that cater to disparate groups, and development of new congregations from fractured communities.

We cannot quibble with worship simply because it is different. What we are called to do is to examine the nature of the story of God revealed in Jesus Christ that forms the center of worship, and that is being taught by what we do. Self-reflection also involves how individual stories and the congregation's story are placed within the story of God. The questions must be asked:

- How do we communicate a story of the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship that addresses the stories of people's lives and forms an interior character of the heart of love of God and neighbor?
- What is it that we do in worship that forms a community of character that translates who and *whose* they come to know themselves to be in external communal practices of worship, care for the needs of those among and beyond them, and study?

- How do we connect with our biblical roots, engage people, and teach the language of prayer, praise, lament, confession, and intercession?
- What does the faith look like that we are forming in worship? What is the story of hope we are shaping?

Endnotes

- ¹ Emphasis on every education in every aspect of the church's life including worship is found in the work of C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond, John Knox, 1971); John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1976); and Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989).
- ² The study of Benson and Eklin also reveals findings of diminishing effectiveness of Christian education programs. See: Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990).
- ³ The words are part of the gospel hymn written by the hymnist and preacher Charles Tindley. The hymn is found in *Songs of Zion*, Supplemental Worship Resources 12 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), no. 10.

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Reflection Guide

Worship as a Model for Faith Formation

Overall Reflection Questions

- How do we communicate a story of the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship that addresses the stories of people's lives and forms an interior character of the heart of love of God and neighbor?
- What is it that we do in worship that forms a community of character that translates who and *whose* they come to know themselves to be in external communal practices of worship, care for the needs of those among and beyond them, and study?
- How do we connect with our biblical roots, engage people, and teach the language of prayer, praise, lament, confession, and intercession?
- What does the faith look like that we are forming in worship? What is the story of hope we are shaping?

Preaching

- What is your awareness of the presence of prophetic, priestly, and apostolic functions of preaching in your congregation?
- Describe your understandings of the prophetic, priestly, and apostolic functions of preaching and the need for them in your congregation.
- What are the messages of faith and hope that are communicated through sermons or homilies in your congregation?

Prayer

- What is the role of prayer in your church?
- Who prays in your congregation?
- In what ways would you say there is need for greater attention to nurturing faith and hope through prayer in your congregation?
- What suggestions would you make about the kinds of opportunities that might be needed in your congregation to help people of all ages deepen their prayer lives?
- How might these opportunities be organized?

Music

- How would you describe the nature and role of music in your worshipping congregation?
- How does music in your congregation respond to the need of every generation for ongoing nurture of faith and hope?
- What needs to happen for the role of music to enlivened as a pathway of nurture across the life span?

Baptism

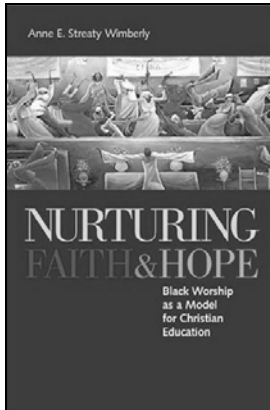
- What opportunities does your congregation provide to explore the nature and meanings of baptism beyond the worshipping congregation?
- What suggestions would you make about the kinds of opportunities that might be needed in your congregation to help people of all ages explore the nature and meanings of baptism?
- How might these opportunities be organized?

Holy Communion

- What opportunities does your congregation provide to explore the nature and meanings of Eucharist beyond the worshipping congregation?
- What suggestions would you make about the kinds of opportunities that might be needed in your congregation to help people of all ages explore the nature and meanings of baptism?
- How might these opportunities be organized?

Resources

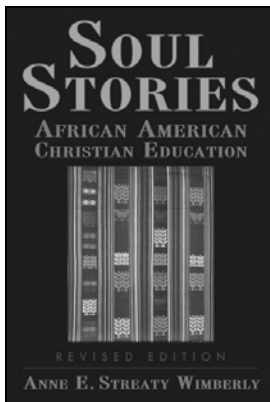
Worship & Faith Formation



Nurturing Faith & Hope—Black Worship as a Model for Christian Education

Anne E. Streaty Wimberly (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004) [\$18]

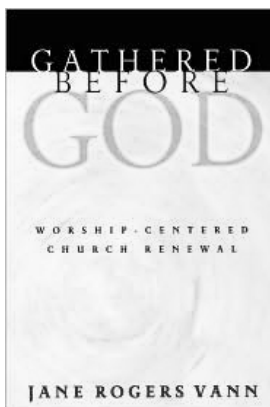
What is happening in our worshiping congregations that nurtures us in our search for faith and hope and that does so in ways that evoke within us the answers we seek? In *Nurturing Faith and Hope*, Wimberly invites readers to critically reflect on their own experiences in worship and the ways in which they are being nurtured—or would like to be—during worship. Worship has emerged as a place where education takes place. This renewed interest is due to three factors. There is 1) research that shows diminishing effectiveness of existing instructional forms of church education; 2) a recognition that worship services continue to be the heart of congregational life; and 3) an increasing embrace by many that worship is a holistic orientation to Christian education. The resource is divided into three sections: Nurture for Belief Formation. Nurture through the Events of Baptism and Holy Communion, and Nurture through Pathways of Preaching, Music Making, and Praying.



Soul Stories—African America Christian Education

Anne E. Streaty Wimberly (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005, revised edition) [\$19]

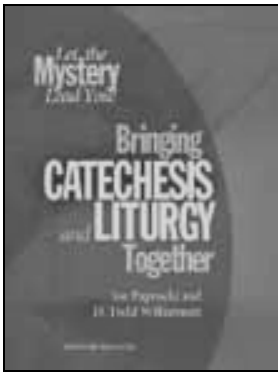
Soul stories link persons' everyday life with the Christian Scriptures. The soul stories in this revised volume take on a cross-generational orientation with emphasis on linking stories of family identities, events, relationships, and story plot with Bible stories and exemplary Christian faith stories. Chapters include: A Story-Linking Process, Exploring Self and World through Story-Linking, Exploring Relationships and Events of Our Lives through Story-Linking, Exploring Life Meanings through Story-Linking, and the Pivotal Role of Scripture in Story-Linking and How to Choose Scripture.



Gathered Before God—Worship-Centered Church Renewal

Jane Rogers Vann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004) [\$19.95]

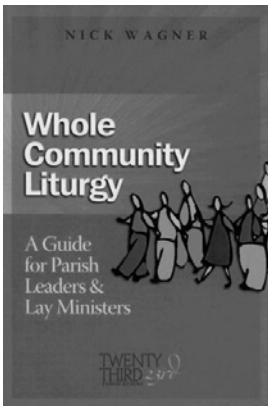
What is the central purpose of the church today? How can churches experience renewal through worship? In *Gathered before God*, Jane Rogers Vann answers these important questions by studying ten vibrant small, medium, and large churches. Her findings show that worship is the most important thing churches do and is vital to the renewal of congregational life. Vann explores how these congregations changed into worship-centered churches and how their experiences can help other churches do the same. *Gathered before God* offers resources for pastors, worship leaders, and Christian educators to reflect on their worship, leading to an openness to change and processes to help church leaders support each other during the periods of reform and renewal. Moving beyond the “contemporary versus traditional debate,” *Gathered before God* is an earnest call for us all to reclaim worship as a central act of our life together as Christians that expresses clearly what the church believes about God, itself, and the world.



Bringing Catechesis and Liturgy Together

Joe Paprocki and D. Todd Williamson (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2002) [\$19.95]

Paprocki and Williamson explore the intimate, essential link between catechesis and liturgy, reflect on the language and mystery of ritual, emphasize the power of signs and symbols in sharing faith, and delve into the mystery and messages of the liturgical year. The authors challenge educators to examine their ministry and invite them to go beyond words; to invite those they teach into a deeper relationship with God through both liturgy and catechesis. Chapters are organized into four sections: 1) Proclaiming the Mystery of Sign, Symbol, and Ritual; 2) Proclaiming the Mystery of the Church at Prayer; 3) Proclaiming the Mystery of the Eucharistic Liturgy; and 4) Proclaiming the Mystery of the Liturgical Year.



Whole Community Liturgy

Nick Wagner (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2005) [\$16.95]

Nick Wagner offers a new framework for active participation in Sunday liturgies and he suggests that parish liturgical celebrations be evaluated with three key questions: 1) Are they prayerful?, 2) Do they deepen faith?, and 3) Does the whole community participate? For parishes who want this kind of active participation, He believes that the guiding principal must be the Triduum, which is the church's fullest and most complete celebration of the life of Jesus. Indeed, the entire focus of its liturgical celebrations is conversion to a Christ-centered life. The book offers specific, concrete steps and details for realizing this at various levels of parish life.

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Passing on Faith—Milestone to Milestone

Linda Staats

*In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’
Tell them... (Joshua 4:6–7)*

Julie and her peers at All Saints were called forward during worship to receive a blanket as a high school graduation gift from the congregation. These were not just any blankets; each young person’s name was embroidered on one corner, and a symbol of the cross and the words *All Saints* appeared on the other. As the blankets were wrapped around the shoulders of Julie and each graduate, a blessing was given: “The arms of the congregation are wrapped around you as you go out into the world. This blanket is a reminder of our love for you, and that you are covered in God’s grace and wrapped in the arms of Jesus. You are God’s child and marked with the sign of the cross forever.” There wasn’t a dry eye among those assembled during this service, which is a highlight of the year for the congregation. But there was also a twinkle in the eye of the small group of wise elders known as the Cut Ups, whose experienced hands and hearts lovingly contributed their time, talents, and prayers to making each blanket.

But this is not the end of the story. In the fall, Julie wrote to me:

Dear Linda,

Months have passed since I graduated and left for college. I want to thank you for coordinating the graduation milestone. The blanket lies on the end of my bed. It does more than add color to my room and keep me warm. The adjustment to college has not been easy, finding new friends and freedom from the watchful eyes of my parents—and you! Every time I have a tough decision to make about what to do or how to fit in, all I need to do is look at the blanket and I remember who I am and whose I am. I am reminded of all who care and pray for me.

Gotta go!

Love, Julie

Linda Staats is the Director of HomeGrown Faith Ministries. With an M.S. in Human Development and the Family from the University of Nebraska, Linda brings a life span approach to ministry and a passion for passing on faith through a vital partnership between congregation and home. Linda provides vision and leadership for faith-based organizations, incorporating the gifts and stories of all generations. Prior to serving as a partner with The Youth & Family Institute and independent facilitator and consultant, Linda served as Assistant to the Bishop, Minister for Faith Formation, for the ELCA Grand Canyon Synod. The author may be contacted at lstaats@tyfi.org.

The Life and Work of the Church

Passing on the Christian faith from generation to generation is at the heart of the life and work of the church. This fundamental task requires much more than passing on biblical and doctrinal information. Passing on the Christian faith to others involves the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives birth to trust and confidence in the creative, redeeming, and renewing power of God.

The goal of lifelong faith formation is to enable a seamless journey of learning and passing on faith to every infant, child, youth, young adult, adult, and elder in our congregations and in our homes. The purpose is for individuals to develop an active, deeply owned faith in Jesus Christ that grounds, sustains, informs, and identifies him or her as a child of God in every age, stage, and transition of life. To accomplish this task, congregations need to align their resources around a vision and mission to nurture and pass on faith by creating a vital church-home partnership and intentional cross-generational culture that forms disciples.

What does Julie's story have in common with baptism, beginning Sunday School, the first day of school, losing a tooth, learning the Lord's Prayer, going to camp for the first time, first communion, receiving a driver's license, graduation, marriage, a new home, loss of a job, a new job, retirement, reliance on a wheelchair, the move into an elder care center, and death? All of these are turning points, rites of passage and potential memorable moments in the faith journey of a Christian. These are milestones in life, and they are experiences that offer an opportunity to celebrate God's presence and be reminded of one's identity as a child of God.

Using milestones as a basis for ministry within the church is a powerful way to engage parishioners of all ages and stages of life in nurturing their faith and spiritual growth. Milestones offer an opportunity to bring God's presence into the home and connect the rituals of daily life with the life of the congregation, thus shaping a vital partnership between home and congregation. Most important, milestones ministry renews and transforms congregations by tending the baptismal journey through all the ages and stages of a life centered in Christ.

Using milestones as a basis for ministry within the church is a powerful way to engage parishioners of all ages and stages of life in nurturing their faith and spiritual growth. Milestones offer an opportunity to bring God's presence into the home and connect the rituals of daily life with the life of the congregation, thus shaping a vital partnership between home and congregation.

My Story

Nineteen ninety-five was a milestone year for me, a time when my educational background in human development converged with my passion for ministry and service in the church. In that year, I left the academic world to serve as the Minister for Faith Development in a mid-size congregation; also during that year, I heard two similar prophetic messages, only months apart, that urged church leaders to partner with the home to teach the faith in new and relevant ways. That April I attended a conference hosted by the local Catholic diocese, where the speaker was John Roberto. I can still see him drawing a church and a house with a line connecting them, and hearing the phrase "church-home connection" for the very first time.

In October of 1995 I participated in a conference called *Child in Our Hands* (now called *Passing on Faith*) in Mesa, Arizona, presented by passionate, visionary voices from The Youth & Family Institute. Along with a sound theological framework for faith formation, they introduced the idea of filling a FaithChest® for children, rather than a toy chest (an idea that has spread across the globe), as well as an idea for giving handmade "Holy Comforters" as gifts at baptism. The host pastor for this conference, Rev. John Bratten, introduced participants to the concept of family-centered confirmation, which begins at baptism and continues with a specific equipping event every year of a child's life through high school graduation. In this approach, confirmation is an intentional journey that begins with birth and involves the entire family and congregation, not a just a step to graduation shaped within a classroom.

Early in his ministry, John had discovered the joy and effectiveness of providing children's education, adult Bible study, and evangelism all at the same time! John Bratten became my patient mentor, freely sharing all his ideas for connecting church and home, congregation and families, for the first eighteen years of life.

And so it was that in 1995, my passion for passing on faith was ignited as visions of church-home connections, Holy Comforters, and FaithChests danced in my head. My own faith DNA and lens for doing ministry were forever altered.

Development of Milestones as Ministry

The phrase "milestones ministry," although it is not trademarked or registered, is most often associated with The Youth & Family Institute in Minnesota. The Youth & Family Institute, under the leadership of Dr. Dick Hardel and Dr. David Anderson, supported by inspiration from Dr. Rollie Martinson at Luther Seminary as well as many other milestone practitioners, has developed and incorporated milestones ministry into the core of its own ministry. Milestones ministry provides congregations with a means to implement a vision for passing on faith. Here, the child is placed in the center and God's redeeming work is at play throughout the interwoven circles of home, congregation, community, culture, and creation. Resources and support for milestones leaders are created by many different sources, including publishers, and made available to congregations to help them connect church and home in the process of passing on the faith.

Over the past forty years, numerous voices and organizations in multiple denominations have called on the church to rethink its approach to faith formation. Anyone who is engaged in the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation is encouraged to read *Will Our Children Have Faith* (1976) by John Westerhoff, *The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage* by Eugene Roehlkepartain (1991), and *Passing on the Faith* by Merton Strommen and Dick Hardel (2000).

Theological Foundation

How do we make every generation a generation of disciples who pass on faith? Part of the answer is to immerse ourselves in a theology of daily life,

Christian vocation, and the priesthood of all believers.

The very point that Jesus makes in the gospel of John—"I have come that they may have life, an abundant life" (10:10)—is best communicated if we connect God with all the milestones of life. Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth, the life" (John 6:14), "I am the bread of life" (John 6:48), "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, God connects with us in all the milestones of life. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus promises, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Jesus is Emmanuel, "God with us." To be effective in discipleship and evangelism, the ministries of Christian congregations must continue to connect God with more milestones in the lives of individuals and families.

Educational Process

Most churchgoers assume that Sunday school and confirmation are the primary means of fulfilling the catechetical, or teaching, mission of the church. However, ongoing research and observation over the past four decades have noted that Sunday school as a stand-alone program has had limited success in passing on Christian faith. Additionally, confirmation has been seen more as a graduation *out* of the Christian faith rather than as a deepening of that journey. Too much emphasis has been placed on isolated educational programs, especially programs that separate children and youth from their parents. Indeed, it has become abundantly clear that for the church to be faithful and effective in forming lifelong disciples, parents and other caregiving adults need to be seen as essential partners in the dynamic journey of passing on the Christian faith from generation to generation. This is the unfinished reformation.

One of the central concerns expressed about milestones ministry is the importance this model places on involving parents and essential caregivers in the faith lives of their children. All too often, critics say, parents are disinterested or already overwhelmed with the daily challenges of family life. The question of how to engage parents and other caring adults—who often seem ill equipped for the task of nurturing the faith of others—in the faith lives of our children and youth is a legitimate one.

Milestones ministry is a form of Christian education that subtly and gently involves parents and other caring adults with the ongoing Christian education of children and youth, while simultaneously engaging them in their own adult faith formation. Parents and caregivers are

motivated by the delight they experience in seeing their children receive recognition, the blessings they receive in the form of prayers and love offered from the congregation, receiving gifts (a visible and physical reminder of the milestone and a resource for faith nurture in their own homes), and connections made with other families and wise elders who form a community of support.

Social-Cultural Context

Stephen Wallace, the national chairman and chief executive officer of SADD who also directs the annual *Teens Today* research project, writes:

For years sociologists and psychologists have mourned the loss of traditions marking childhood “rites of passage.” In earlier American culture, movement toward adulthood was accompanied by more ritualistic, meaningful celebrations of transition to newfound independence and responsibility to the family and community. Indeed, absent reasonable recognition of their early milestones, many young people seek alternative rites to “maturity,” including drinking, drugging, dangerous driving, and early intimate sexual behavior. In a culture largely devoid of formal “rites of passage” and too often unobservant of the few that exist, young people may make up their own. By paying attention to the important transitions of childhood and adolescents, influential adults...can make it less likely that poor choices will become a child’s self-constructed mileposts along the path to adulthood.

The Milestones Ministry Model

The story of Noah (Genesis 8:8–22, 9:1–17) provides the template and the basic ingredients for milestones ministry, and reminds us to tell the story of God’s promise from generation to generation. In the Noah story:

1. A significant life event, the flood, represents an ending and a new beginning. The transition for Noah and his family is named, recognized and marked. The event is memorable and transforming.
2. Noah and his family (two generations) are actively involved.
3. God’s presence is recognized.
4. An altar is built. Noah and his family express their faith and gratitude for God’s care. God

makes a promise and a covenant with Noah. God further instructs Noah and his family on how to live. God blesses them.

5. There is a symbol, the rainbow, that becomes a means to “remember” and tell the story again and again and again. The symbol imparts meaning and creates a sense of belonging to a faith community of people who trust God. The rainbow is a gift from God and a reminder of God’s faithfulness and promise in daily life.

Milestones ministry weaves the following four basic elements into a vital partnership between the congregation and the home, whether that home is a house in the suburbs, a farmhouse, dorm, apartment, hogan, casa, group home, room in an elder care facility, or a motor home. These elements can be incorporated into any milestone, whether it is a birth, a baptism, a new puppy, a graduation, a wedding, joining an AA group, losing one’s hair due to chemo, a retirement, a funeral, or any occasion related to a stage, age, or moment in life.

I. Naming and Marking

Naming and marking the sacred and ordinary events in the life of a congregation and in our daily life (e.g., beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, rites of passage) creates rituals and traditions that shape us and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.

2. Equipping

Equipping provides instruction related to the milestone, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and brings at least two generations together. Participants learn from each other as they engage in experiential, cross-generational learning that serves as a model for faith practices in the home. Take-home resources encourage continued practice and the building of meaningful relationships. The equipping events may be a one-time gathering on a Sunday, or multiple-week gatherings on Saturdays or weekday nights. Today’s families more readily make short-term commitments than those involving a larger time frame.

3. Blessing

Blessing the individual, marking the occasion in worship, and providing tools for naming and blessing in the home says this is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred and the sacred ordinary.

4. Gifting

Gifting is a tangible way to provide a symbol and a reminder of the occasion being marked. Gifting serves as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life. It has the potential to engage people's interests and talents in milestone events, as well as connect them to one another in new, meaningful relationships.

The Four Keys

At the heart and practice of every milestone both in the congregation and at home are the "four keys," formative daily faith practices first introduced by Dr. David Anderson in 1989 (see *Frogs Without Legs Can't Hear: Nurturing Disciples In Home and Congregation*). The four keys are simple and practical. Milestone leaders are encouraged to practice them at every equipping event, providing a model and a resource for use in the home. The four keys open one's imagination to explore and play with additional ways of celebrating the Christian faith both at home and away from home. They are:

- caring conversation
- devotions
- acts of service
- rituals and traditions.

It's All About Faith!

"Milestones" is a familiar word to most of us. When I open my hometown weekly newspaper, the caption on the last page reads, "Milestones." On this page the births, deaths, engagements, and weddings are announced to the local community.

Dr. Paul Hill, executive director of The Youth & Family Institute and author of *Coming of Age*, introduces his audiences to milestones this way:

The research in the United States indicates that the average person connects the ministry of the Christian congregation to four milestones: birth/baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial. When teenagers say, "What does First United Methodist (or St. James Lutheran or St. Paul's Episcopal, etc.) have to do with life?" or "What does Jesus have to do with life?" they are not against God or the Church. They are only responding to what they have seen and/or experienced. If the only time a relationship with a gracious God is talked about happens in the buildings of the congregation and then, only around the four milestones of birth, confirmation, marriage, and burial, then our God and our faith are in a box.

How do we connect the events of our lives with God's biblical stories in a way that can help us realize God is traveling with us? How do we bring the milestones of the church year into the home, and how do we bring the milestones of home and society into the church? How do we celebrate those expected and anticipated events that are marked on the calendar and planned well in advance, as well as the events that are unexpected? In the midst of the milestones that give rhythm to daily life, how do families regularly acknowledge God at work in the highs and the lows, the beginnings and the endings, the giggles and the tears?

The following three categories are offered as examples for thinking about any and all aspects of life as having the potential for naming milestones that join our story with God's story. Milestones can intersect and weave together the circles of family, church, community, one's culture and creation. Each event listed has the potential to be claimed as a milestone and recognized in the congregation, at home and away from home.

- **Congregational milestones:** baptism, baptismal anniversary, celebration of Jesus' baptism, entry into Sunday School, first communion, presentation of Bibles, beginning confirmation, the rite of confirmation, marriage, death, the seasons of the church year (such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week), and learning the prayers, creeds, and various teachings of one's faith.
- **Human development and daily living:** birth, birthdays, first tooth, first steps, folding hands for prayer, toilet training, playing church, beginning school, burying a pet, braces, puberty, first date, driver's license, graduation, leaving home, going to camp, entering the military, lifelong commitment to another, end of a relationship, anniversaries, first job or new job, birth or adoption of children, first home, a new home, moving, disposing of possessions and moving into an assisted living center, retirement, and death.
- **Civic celebrations:** These important dates mark significant historical events and celebrations in our community and culture, and solidify our identity and sense of belonging as citizens of the United States: Memorial Day, Labor Day, the Fourth of July, Election Day, Thanksgiving, New Years, Mother's Day and Father's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, President's Day, and Veterans Day. Within specific cultures are celebrations such as Kwanzaa, Cinco de Mayo, and many more.

Next Steps

So how do we begin to incorporate milestones ministry into our congregations and homes?

First, begin with yourself and your own household, extended family, and friends. Become deliberate about looking for opportunities to name and claim God's presence in your own daily life. Understand your own home as a center for faith formation for your family and guests. For example, every couple whose wedding my husband and I attend receives a red toolbox from ACE hardware. On the lid we inscribe, "Joe & Jane's Faith Chest." We then enclose a letter in which we explain that "ACE" stands for Active Couple Enrichment! Also enclosed is a gift certificate for the hardware store, and a few resources to support the couple's life together (our favorites are a copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, written by Eugene H. Peterson, and a prayer book for couples). The unwrapped red toolbox perched among elegantly wrapped gifts always receives lots of attention—evangelism at its best!

Take inventory of all the milestones your congregation already marks; by the very nature of being a community of faith, milestones are practiced. Ask, "How do these fit the model of milestones ministry? Examine your entire ministry, asking, "How is this activity equipping parents and caring adults to nurture faith? How is this celebration supporting households to be centers of faith? Do we name? equip? bless? gift? Do we use the four keys to model in the congregation what we want individuals and families to practice in their homes? Are all the generations gathered at church and in homes to share stories and engage in meaningful interaction?

The following letter, from a Methodist youth minister in Virginia, contains an example of viewing one's ministry through a milestones lens:

The mother of a high school senior called this morning to discuss her daughter. The father is being deployed to Iraq in February, and the daughter is having a difficult time letting go. The mother was concerned because her daughter didn't want to attend two up-coming youth retreats, choosing instead to stay home with Dad and spend that time with him. She was trying to convince her daughter to attend the youth events.

At that moment, milestones ministry "clicked" for me! The event this young lady will remember for the rest of her life is her father's deployment. This is the milestone event of her senior year. Nothing we do can change that; however, as the faith community,

we have an opportunity to shape how this experience will be remembered. Will she remember this as a time of grief, loneliness, and worry? Or will she remember this as a milestone in her faith journey, a time when she chose to entrust God with the well-being of her father?

The mother and I talked about what we could do to make this an important moment, a milestone in the faith life of the entire family. I suggested they consider inviting the pastor and myself to come to their home and, as a family, hold a "sending" service in which they might be able to express to one another what this event means, and together place it in the hands of God. Milestones ministry is reshaping how I look at youth ministry and the opportunities we have to impact the faith journey of our young people.

Second, select a milestone you already mark as a congregation or household, and enrich it to reflect the milestones ministry model. For example, if your congregation already celebrates the giving and receiving of Bibles for a specific age group, add two or three weeks of cross-generational interaction and learning. Instead of the pastor or Christian education leader placing a Bible in the hands of the child, give the Bible to the parent(s), who then places it in the hands of the child, saying, "Today I am keeping my promise to teach you the faith."

Third, add one milestone each year to your church calendar and home calendar. For example, receiving a driver's license is a fun civic and developmental milestone to bring into the gathered community of faith and to lift up at home. When this milestone was introduced into my congregation, everyone got it! "Oh, this is about *all* of life. This is about *all* of us keeping our promises. This is *all* about faith!" Here's how this example can play out within the four elements described earlier in this article:

1. **Naming:** Receiving a driver's license.
2. **Equipping:** Gather at least two generations, the one who is receiving a license and members of the household where that person lives. Include a presentation by someone who represents the community, such as a police officer, a company that provides car insurance, or a representative from the local MADD or SADD organizations. The book *Can I Have the Keys to the Car?* a book that invites caring conversations about covenants and expectations related to driving, may be given to participating families. Incorporate common road signs into the presentation as daily reminders of the faith journey.

3. **Blessing:** Invite all new drivers to a special worship service. Pray for them and bless them. Provide a four key blessing for adults and youth to use at home as the new driver embarks on the first solo drive.
4. **Gifting:** Give a key chain in the worship service or at the equipping event as a symbol of the covenant between God, the child, parents/guardians, and the community of faith that the new driver be accountable for his or her actions.

Milestones have the potential of weaving together the circles of influence in a person's life: family, friends, congregation, community, culture, and creation. For example, one congregation invited elders to bring pictures of their first car, which provided an opportunity for cross-generational storytelling. New drivers were engaged in acts of service by delivering items for shut-ins. They also helped plan the Trunk and Treat Halloween festival for the community. The equipping event inspired a small group who went on to research the driving laws in other countries. They also discussed alternative fuel sources and care for creation. A plan of action was formed for people to share rides to church on Sunday.

If every congregation linked receiving a driver's license to the practice of faith, as well as to the home and daily life, how might it affect the entire health of a community? Could it lower the high accident rate for teen drivers? It is *all* about faith!

Support for Milestones Ministry

Milestones ministry is much more than a program or a curriculum. The model as presented in this article provides the essential ingredients for identifying, strengthening, and creating a milestones approach to ministry. Specific resources, tools, and training are available for congregations and homes that want specific support in building an intentional partnership between home and congregation (see the bibliography).

Another source of support material is the Internet. Simply enter the words "milestones ministry" into a search engine such as Google, Ask, Yahoo and explore the sites listed. Calendars for a full year of milestones are listed at All Saints Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ (www.allsaintsphoenix.org) and Tanque Verde Lutheran Church (www.tvlc.org) in Tucson, AZ; St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Williamsport, PA

(www.stmarkswilliamsport.org) posts pictures of the resources they provide for each milestone.

Challenges and Opportunities

It is evident that milestones ministry has greatly impacted and improved the efforts of congregations and households to pass on the faith. Yet there are still challenges for congregations to be aware of and explore in the process. These include:

- Incorporating and integrating all four elements of the milestones Ministry model into congregational life. Some congregations are caught up in the gifting aspect and forget about equipping. Others equip only the kids and forget about the adults.
- Remembering that the primary purpose of milestones ministry is to create homes as centers for faith formation. For example, participants in milestones are often blessed in worship, but may not feel qualified to bless one another in their own homes.
- Creating a milestones team with shared responsibility and a variety of gifts. The pastor and worship leaders need to be involved in the process, along with Christian education leaders. Enlist caring adults who are eager to do more than just drop off and pick up their kids.
- Naming rites of passage and marking milestones beyond the age of eighteen. Milestones ministry is for all ages and stages of life.

Some pastors initially panic when introduced to milestones ministry and say, "We can't be holding all these special services!" Although that statement can be debated, the worship team needs to decide which milestones will be recognized by the entire faith community, and which ones can be celebrated in homes or in smaller gatherings of the community.

Benefits

Now that we've explored how milestones ministry works, let's take a look at what it can do for your entire congregation.

- Church and home are connected as parents and caregivers of children are encouraged to grow in their own faith and equipped to be teachers of the faith, even in their own homes.
- The language of faith is spoken daily and expressed through actions both at home and in daily life.

- Children grow up anticipating their next milestone as a mark of maturation, supported by the community of faith. Households are supported through every age and stage of life.
- Daily life is connected, in real, tangible ways, to being a lifelong disciple of Christ.
- Children and youth develop a sense of belonging to God's family that can sustain them for a lifetime.
- Elders are encouraged to share their passion and stories, leaving a legacy of faith for the next generation.
- Authentic and affirming adults are available to lovingly surround children and nurture faith.
- Faith is modeled and practiced through the four keys.
- The nurturing of faith extends beyond the classroom, and becomes more than classroom handouts and isolated lessons.
- Members of all the generations are engaged in providing meaningful resources to support lifelong learning.
- Care and concern for other members of the faith community grows as interaction increases.
- People are motivated by faith to make difference in the community and world.
- Congregations are revitalized and renewed as ministries are aligned around a vision for nurturing and passing on the faith.

Finding our Way Home

Rev. Mindy Bak, author of *Together in Faith*, explains the need for milestones ministry with a familiar fairytale.

When Hansel and Gretel leave the safety of their house to venture into the woods, they leave a trail of breadcrumbs to mark the way back home. The children of God have a way of wandering off as well, which is why it is ever important for us as faithful leaders and parents to leave a trail by which they may always find their way home. Instead of breadcrumbs, we leave a path of milestones. This way, when our children (of any age) become lost and begin to long for home, they will only have to look about them to see the trail of milestones and say, "Look, here is God in my life. And here, and here, and here." Milestones are a visual reminder, or mileposts, that help us find our way back home into God's arms, as well as the welcoming arms of those who love and care for us.

As Mindy gives this explanation to her congregation, she literally walks the church, dropping small stones in the baptismal font, on the altar, at the base of a chalice, by the front door of the church, and in the hands of new parents, caring adults, and wise elders.

Conclusion

Milestones ministry places all of life under the care, blessing and direction of our gracious God in Christ Jesus. Every ending, beginning, transition, and moment in life is an opportunity to actively claim God's redemptive and renewing work in the world and in our lives. To weave our stories with God's story is to live with confidence in God's care in every way, every place—all the time.

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Reflection Guide

Milestones Faith Formation

Milestones provide an excellent way of developing lifelong faith formation by fashioning faith formation around each milestone through preparation, celebration, and follow-through using the Milestones Ministry Model:

1. **Naming and Marking.** *Naming and marking* the sacred and ordinary events in the life of a congregation and in our daily life (e.g., beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, rites of passage) creates rituals and traditions that shape us and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.
2. **Equipping.** *Equipping* provides instruction related to the milestone, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and brings at least two generations together. Participants learn from each other as they engage in experiential, cross-generational learning that serves as a model for faith practices in the home. Take-home resources encourage continued practice and the building of meaningful relationships. The equipping events may be a one-time gathering on a Sunday, or multiple-week gatherings on Saturdays or weekday nights. Today's families more readily make short-term commitments than those involving a larger time frame.
3. **Blessing.** *Blessing* the individual, marking the occasion in worship, and providing tools for naming and blessing in the home says this is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred and the sacred ordinary.
4. **Gifting.** *Gifting* is a tangible way to provide a symbol and a reminder of the occasion being marked. Gifting serves as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life. It has the potential to engage people's interests and talents in milestone events, as well as connect them to one another in new, meaningful relationships.

Assessing Your Church's Approach

Use the following questions to reflect on your church's practice of milestones faith formation.

- Take an inventory of all the milestones your congregation already celebrates.
- Which of the following milestones are part of your church's faith formation efforts today?
 - Marriage
 - Anniversary of Marriage
 - Baptism
 - Anniversary of Baptism
 - Welcoming Young Children to Worship
 - Receiving a first Bible
 - Learning to pray
 - First Communion
 - Confirmation
 - Graduation (high school, college)
 - First Job
 - Leaving Home / First House or Apartment
 - Becoming a Grandparent
 - Illness
 - Retirement
 - Death
- How does your congregation currently provide faith formation around milestone events using the Milestones Ministry Model: 1) Naming and Marking, 2) Equipping, 3) Blessing, 4) Gifting
- What does your congregation need to do to strengthen its current approach to milestones faith formation? What are one or two new milestones around which your church can develop faith formation?

For Family-Centered Milestones

- How is this activity equipping parents and caring adults to nurture faith?
- How is this celebration supporting households to be centers of faith? Do we name? equip? bless? gift? Do we use the four keys to model in the congregation what we want individuals and families to practice in their homes?
- Are all the generations gathered at church and in homes to share stories and engage in meaningful interaction?
- How does your church provide home activities and resources for each milestone?



SAMPLE Bulletin Insert for Congregational Blessing

Today we celebrate a milestone in the lives of our new drivers.
[Parents and guardians and new drivers come forward.]

Reading

Exodus 13:21-22: *The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.*

Leader: As you begin to drive by day and you see the clouds in the sky, remember the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites by day.

Congregation: Let God be your guide.

Leader: As you drive at night and see the lights of houses, signs, and cars, remember the pillar of fire that led the Israelites by night.

Congregation: Let God be your guide.

Leader: The scripture passage tells us that the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left their place in front of the people, and our prayer is that you, too, will know this and remember this, that the Lord will always go with you and guide you on your way.

To help you remember this, your parents and our congregation have a gift for you. These Key chains are in the shape of *[name shape, such as a cross]* and they display the words "*[read words on keychain]*" to remind you that God does indeed go with you wherever you go.

Gift of the Key Chain and Youth Blessing

[Parents hand the key chain to their youth then lay hands on their children.]

Parents: Guardian of all, we give thanks for your Holy Spirit, who accompanies *[name]* on all journeys, short and long, for work, for learning, for relationship, for family, for mission, and for all destinations. We give thanks for your constant presence and guidance. Amen.

Parent's Blessing

[Students lay hands on their parents.]

Students: In this time of my new responsibilities and my parents letting go, help us to find reasons to trust each other. Even in the midst of worry let there be trust, peace, patience, and pardon, as the presence of your Holy Spirit guides us. Amen.

Congregation Blessing

Congregation: May the Holy Spirit fill you and give you wisdom and peace in this time of letting go and newfound freedom. Amen.

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Milestone Blessing Bowls

Bowls and stones created by Artist and Potter
Dawn Deines-Christensen



Meaningful, Memorable Moments Woven into a life lived in faith

When your children ask their parents in times to come,
"What do these stones mean?" Then you shall let your children know... Joshua 4:21-22
What do these stones mean to you?

EVERY DAY IS A GOD DAY
TELL THE STORIES – BLESS THE DAYS – SHARE THE PRAYERS

The extraordinary grace of God is hidden in the ordinary happenings of each day.
It is in the stories of families and friends that people receive their meaning, identity and purpose.

A Few Ways to Use Milestone Blessing Bowls!

1. Display on table or desk: People ask, "What is this?" and you will share stories of faith and life.
2. Family gathering or small groups: Invite each to pick a stone and tell about a recent milestone experience.
3. To honor a person: Invite everyone to pick a stone and tell a life story about the honoree.
4. Carry a stone in your pocket: Take into the day as a reminder of the people and the God whose love goes with you.
5. To pray: Pick a stone at random and pray for the life situation that comes to mind.
6. At the dinner table: Pass the blessing bowl, each selecting a stone and sharing a story of his or her day.
7. At a meeting: Use the blessing bowl to open the meeting, to check in on life's joys and sorrows.
8. To close time together: Take a stone representing what each is facing this week and ask, "What shall we pray for you?"
9. With young children: Match each stone to its picture on the pad. The inevitable question, "What does this one mean?" opens conversation.
10. Bible Study groups: Invite people to select a stone that describes what has happened in their lives since they last met.
11. Build a collection: Add to the bowl a pebble or shell or small memento that holds a memory.
12. Send a gift: Mark life milestones by giving a gift to a favorite ministry or charity.
13. Use a dry erase maker: On the blank stone, write your own milestone highlight for the day.

THE YOUTH & FAMILY INSTITUTE

1601 West Old Shakopee Road • Bloomington, MN 55431
Order bowls at: 877-239-2492 • www.tyfi.org
Caution: Please keep out of reach of small children

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MEANING OF THE STONES

Beginnings & Completions

Examples...

*Engagement • Graduation • First School Bus Ride
Driver's License • New Job • Moving Away • Retirement
Child Leaves Home*

In blessing new beginnings or completions we are reminded that a God who is familiar with us meets us in unfamiliar places. The creation story in Genesis states that every day had a sunrise and a sunset, "And there was evening and there was morning."

Sacred

Examples ...

*Family Time • Wedding • Funeral • Confirmation •
Baptism • Creation • Christian Holy Days • Eucharist*
The holy and sacred are found in the presence of God. Symbols, rituals and traditions are sacred when we meet God there Moses, standing before God in the burning bush was told, "the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Ex. 3:5)

Remembering

Examples ...

*Birthdays • National Holidays • Reunions • Sobriety
Anniversary • Baptism Birthdays • Anniversaries
Bible Stories • Songs*

We learn from the past so that we can move forward in life. Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5 we are commanded to keep a Sabbath day, to remember what God has done and is doing in our lives.

Care

Examples...

*Helping Others • Supporting Missions • Prayer
Campaigning for Peace, Justice, and Mercy
Medical Assistance • Visiting • Caring for Creation*
This milestone represents giving and receiving care with grace and gratitude. "Who is my neighbor?" the young lawyer asked. Jesus answered with the Good Samaritan Story (Luke 10: 25-37), giving us direction for faithful living.

Gratitude

Examples ...

*Friendships • Family • Health and Healing • Miracles
Appreciation • Prayers • Gifts • Thanksgiving Days*
We applaud, whistle, shout, stomp, sing, pray, smile, hug, give. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." (Psalm 136: 1)

Mountain Highs

Examples ...

*Birth of a Child • Recognition • Fishing with Dad
Learning to Read • Falling in Love • Achievement
Seeing a Comet or Star • Worship*
After looking at the heavens, the moon, and all the stars, the Psalmist in Psalm 8 states, "what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" Mountain Highs are Wow Moments!

Quests

Examples ...

*Learning to Dance • Job Interview • Running a Marathon
Discerning Vocation • Engaging in Mission • Try Outs
Climbing a Mountain • Finding a Treasure*
Quests are the times of wonder, stepping into the unknown, and taking the risk of exploring a new path in life. In Matthew 16:24 we are reminded that we are called to step away from our comfort zones, pick up our cross, and follow Jesus.

Valley Lows

Examples ...

*Fired from Job • End of Relationship • Acts of
Inhumanity • Recognition of Sin • Broken Trust • Failure
Destroying Creation • Depression*
Having the rug pulled out from under you, having the wind knocked out of you, depleted, disappointed, distressed, and distraught describe the low experiences and empty feelings of Valley Lows. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

Loss

Examples ...

*Death • Loss of Pet • Loss of Job • Miscarriage • Divorce
Loss of Health • Loss of Love • Loss of Family Farm*
In our deepest pain, God graciously wipes our tears and holds us with the arms of the cross as long as we need to be held. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8: 37-39

Other Milestones

God wants to be centered in every milestone of our lives. A God who is familiar often meets us in unfamiliar places and surprises us with grace. Jesus last words to his disciples, then and now, are, "remember, I am with you always." (Mt. 28:20)

TELL YOUR MILESTONE STORIES!



Resources

Milestones Faith Formation



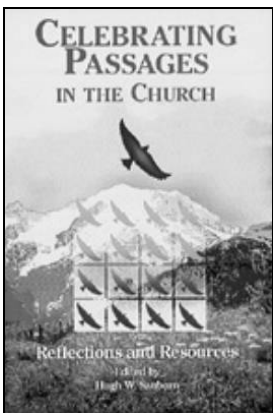
Milestones Ministry Manual for Home and Congregation
Youth and Family Institute (Bloomington, MN: Youth and Family Institute, 2007)
[\$99] (www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org)

The *Milestone Ministry Manual for Home and Congregation* provides faith formation resources for home and congregation designed around sixteen life milestones from birth to high school graduation. There are three elements for each of the sixteen milestones: 1) worship—a litany and blessing, 2) cross-generational learning experience, and 3) household faith resources. Included among the 16 milestones are: baptism, anniversary of baptism, welcoming young children to worship, entering Sunday school, kids & money, blessing of the backpacks, First Communion, bible presentation and adventure, first time campers, sexuality, middle school, entering confirmation, confirmation, driver's license, and high school graduation.



Faith Stepping Stones
Faith Inkubators (www.faithink.com)

Faith Stepping Stones is a family ministry system that pulls parents into the role of primary faith mentors for their own children every night in every home. Faith Stepping Stones is a process that bonds parents and children into the body of Christ at eight crucial moments in parenting and leads them to incubate faith every night in every home. It provides faith-based parenting education from cradle to graduation through a series of eight short-courses. Each course brings parents and children together for fun and learning, and ends at the altar with a special blessing service. Through this process, parents and children develop nightly faith practices that includes blessing, prayer, scripture reading, sharing of Highs & Lows, faith dialogue, and a nightly “I’m sorry” before turning out the lights on the day. This “every night in every home” ritual blesses the child, gifts the family, and calls parents to their promise while incubating faith.



Celebrating Passages in the Church—Reflections and Resources

Hugh W. Sanborn, editor. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999) [\$19.99]

The milestones that mark the journey between life and death once were affirmed by ceremonies in the church. Today only a few of the old liturgies remain, and congregations miss the chance to celebrate and commemorate life's passages together. Each chapter includes an essay that explore the theory and theology behind the rite and a sample service or materials for a service that can be adapted to specific situations. The following milestones are included in the book: birth, transition from infancy to childhood, growing toward committed discipleship, coming of age, believer's baptism, marriage, divorce, women entering midlife, men at midlife, later maturity, leaving a home, and dying.



Total Community Catechesis for Lifelong Faith Formation

Thomas Groome, Ph.D.

Christian religious educators must be committed to lifelong faith formation of our peoples and of ourselves. Further, this requires both intentional socialization and reflective education by a total Christian community; it takes a village with a school—of some kind. Of course, so much depends on what we mean by “Christian faith,” so let me begin there.

My concern as a religious educator is not an abstract definition but a description of existential Christian faith, of its evident aspects when realized in the life of a person or community. When incarnated so, Christian faith is itself a *total* affair. With the help of God’s grace, the intent of the catechetical educator¹ should be Christian faith, 1) that engages and permeates people’s *heads, hearts, and hands*; 2) that is *lived, living, and life-giving* for all; and 3) that is ever being *informed, formed, and transformed* in discipleship to Jesus in a community of disciples for God’s reign in the world.

1. We readily recognize Jesus’ “totalizing” of discipleship in how he preached and lived the Great Commandment. Consistent with his own Jewish faith, he taught that “you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Dt. 6:5), in other words, with our total being. However, he explicitly coupled this with “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (as in Lv. 19:18), and radicalized “neighbor” to include even enemies and those who hate us (see Lk. 6:27–36). Thus, Christian faith is realized as we love God by loving all others as ourselves, and this must engage and permeate our heads, our hearts, and our hands (virtues and ethics): our total personhood.
2. Jesus’ call to discipleship was to “follow the way,” to embrace a *lived* faith. It is not enough to confess Jesus as Lord; one must also do the will of God (see Mt. 7:21). The true family of Jesus “are those who hear the word of God and act on it” (Lk. 8:21). Likewise, it should be a *living* faith, vibrant and growing, ever drawing upon the “living waters” that Jesus promised to the Samaritan Woman at the well, and to Christians ever after (see John 4). And always, Christian faith should promote “life more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10), not only for Christian persons and communities but “for the life of the world” (Jn. 6:51) as well.

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3. Being *informed* in Christian faith includes but means more than knowing “about” it. Indeed we should know well and understand its data; beyond this, however, we must come to embrace it as our own out of personal conviction and let it guide every decision we make. *Formation* in such faith pertains to our very “being” as both noun and verb; it should shape who we are and how we live our lives. This means “becoming” like Jesus Christ, embracing “the way” that he modeled and made possible, living Christian values and virtues as integral to our personhood. And *transformation* calls Christian persons and communities to a never-ending process of conversion into holiness of life after the way of Jesus. This and all of the above calls us to discipleship in a community of Jesus’ disciples, and likewise to the abiding work of transforming our church, society, and world toward God’s reign.

If the journey of such faith could have a point-of-arrival this side of eternity, we could assign its catechetical education to a particular age group, with a beginning and end. But, to echo the opening lines of Augustine’s *Confessions*, our heart’s desire is never fully satisfied until we rest in God. Such *total* faith requires what the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican Congregation for Clergy, 1998, hereafter *GDC*) repeatedly mandates as “permanent catechesis.” Further, such *total* faith cannot be initiated, sustained, and developed—lifelong—except by the intentional socialization and reflective education of a Christian community. Throughout the remainder of this essay I will attempt to describe a generic approach to such socialization and education in faith that I name as “total community catechesis” (hereafter TCC).

First, an explanation of *total* in TCC. I note immediately that *whole* community catechesis is also a favored name for this emerging approach and I find this entirely acceptable; whether called *whole* or *total*, this is the same worthy movement, one surely prompted by the Holy Spirit. However, when I first began to advocate TCC some 20 years ago, and in my first published essay proposing it (see Groome, “Parish as Catechist” in *Church*, Fall, 1990), I used the word “total” for some good reasons. It suggests that the church’s catechetical ministry should engage every baptized Christian in the reciprocal dynamics of teaching and learning their faith together. Likewise, *total* should encourage Christian communities to harness the catechetical potential of every ministry and aspect of their life in faith.

...I understand total community catechesis as an intentional coalition of parish, family, and programs/school that engages every member and all aspects of each unit, by and for people of all ages, teaching and learning together by and for people of all ages, teaching and learning together for total Christian faith toward God’s reign in the world.

Instead of catechesis as one slice among others of community life, we need a 360-degree approach: *total*. And it echoes the totalizing demands of Christian faith that were already outlined above. This being said, I understand total community catechesis as an intentional coalition of parish, family, and programs/school that engages every member and all aspects of each unit, by and for people of all ages, teaching and learning together for *total* Christian faith toward God’s reign in the world.

Warrants for TCC and Lifelong Faith Formation

Every community of faith, whatever its religious tradition, would do well to practice such a total approach to lifelong faith formation. However, since the challenge is to implement it within particular communities, each must find the warrants within their own theological framework. For this reason, I draw primarily here from my Catholic Christian tradition. To begin, and when at its best, Catholicism emphasizes the totalness of Christian faith. The *Baltimore Catechism* had it right; the very purpose of human existence is *to know, love, and serve* God in this life (head, heart, and hands), and the journey does not end until we are happy with God forever in the next—a total and lifelong affair.

Likewise, that Christian faith be lived, living, and life-giving for the life of the world reflects the Catholic conviction that faith alone saves as it is realized in daily life, including the good works of compassion and justice for all. Catholicism has always preferred to read James’ insistent repetition that “faith without works is dead” (James 2)

alongside of Paul's unbounded confidence that we are "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1).

Further, a constitutive aspect of Catholicism is the centrality of church and community to the life of Christian faith. We go so far as to claim that the bond of baptism is never broken, not even by death, uniting the church on earth with those gone ahead, with all interceding for each other as needed. And though conversion can occur as a cataclysmic experience—like Paul's on the road to Damascus—Catholicism understands conversion as more typically a lifelong process. Even the greatest saints were keenly aware of their need for growth in holiness of life. The very title of Chapter 5 of the Second Vatican Council's document *Constitution on the Church* reflects that every Christian is called by baptism to lifelong growth into discipleship: "The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness."

Vatican II's reclaiming of a radical theology of baptism—as if it is the root (Latin *radix*) of our identity—also points to the need for lifelong socialization and education in faith, to be done by the total faith community. For example, "The baptized, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood" (*Constitution of the Church* #10). All the baptized are "sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ...in the mission of the whole church (to) the world" (#31). Such statements are a clarion call to a new level of co-responsibility for our faith; rather than being divided into agents and dependents, we are all responsible together: a total community affair. As and through the total faith community, we need "permanent catechesis" (*GDC*) or lifelong faith formation.

Add, too, the great legacy of Pope John Paul II in his championing of "a new evangelization." Gone are the days when we can limit evangelization to what missionaries do in foreign lands. Instead, every Christian person and community is required—again by baptism—both *to evangelize* and *to be evangelized*. And the emphasis is no longer on "bringing them (newcomers to the church) in," but on "bringing us out," calling Christians to live our faith in the marketplace of life, to have it permeate every aspect of our personal lives and the socio-cultural world in which we live. To sustain such "new" evangelization, every Christian person and community needs lifelong faith formation. The theological reasons could go on, but let us draw a little from the social sciences.

I've made the case that Christian faith invites those who embrace it to become Christian persons, to take on Christian identity. However, the social sciences are unanimous that identity is formed through relationships and community, by socialization (sociology) and enculturation

(anthropology). Indeed, we don't need any science to verify this basic insight; it is the common wisdom of life that every particular identity—personhood—is formed and sustained by the corresponding community. Becoming a Polish person requires the socialization and enculturation of a Polish community; becoming a Hispanic person requires a Hispanic community; thus, a Christian person requires a Christian community.

In a previous era, it was commonplace for particular faiths to be geographically located and confined; there they combined with their local cultures for a powerful marinade that could seep to the bone marrow of people. However, our postmodern world has invaded such lifestyle enclaves with diversity and multiple influences—often contrary to faith formation. So, what could be taken for granted in villages like my original Irish one—where one became Christian by osmosis—must now be crafted intentionally. This requires each Christian family, parish, program, or school to mold its milieu so as to socialize and enculturate people in Christian identity.

To conclude this section, I note the warrant offered by developmental psychology for TCC as an approach to lifelong faith formation. The research of James Fowler, et al., has amply demonstrated that the journey of faith may proceed through six recognizable stages of development. I say *may* proceed because people do not inevitably make progress in their lives of faith. In fact, the research suggests that most become "arrested" at a Stage 3 conventional faith. Perhaps in a less complex world and more uniform society, a conventional faith was sufficient for facing the vagaries of life. Now, however, the counter forces of post modernity make it less likely that a Stage 3 faith will survive the challenges of adulthood. As a result, many people abandon their faith because it truly is inadequate to their lives in the world. These postmodern times make more exigent that people continue to "develop" in their faith, as in so many other aspects of their lives. TCC can provide the needed lifelong faith formation along the way.

The Key Features of TCC

The defining feature of TCC is that it shifts catechesis beyond the schooling paradigm (without leaving its assets behind) to a community-centered approach. Within this paradigm shift, there are many sub-shifts: beyond didaction to conversation; beyond information to formation; beyond religious knowledge to spiritual wisdom; beyond children to

all people; beyond teachers and taught to communities sharing faith together.

This paradigm shift requires strategies and programs to implement it but its fundamental *modus operandi* is that every Christian person, family, and community take on a catechetical consciousness. By this I mean becoming aware that every aspect of our lives, personally and communally, can be and should be engaged to educate in Christian faith. For the person, instead of seeing catechesis as a ministry that some Christians do (the parochial or Sunday school teachers), all must embrace it as the mandate of baptism. Instead of the parish limiting catechesis to its ministry of the word, it must recognize the educational potential of all its ministries, and heighten their catechetical effect. Instead of the family seeing itself as ancillary to the catechetical educators of a parish program or school, parents must reverse this equation and embrace their responsibilities as “the first and foremost religious educators of their children” (Vatican II, *Decree on Education* #3). And parish programs and parochial schools must attend to their implicit catechetical curriculum as well as their explicit one, i.e., must harness every aspect to promote lifelong faith formation.

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One schematic way to imagine implementing this approach is for the parish, family, and school or program to participate in all the ministries of the church—each in its own way—and with a catechetical consciousness. Since the earliest Christian communities, the church has described its core ministries as: *koinonia*, demanding that it be a community of living *witness* to Christian faith; *leitourgia*, requiring the community to *worship* God together; *diakonia*, mandating care for people’s

physical and spiritual *welfare*; and *kerygma* that requires evangelizing, preaching, and teaching God’s *word* of revelation that comes through Scripture and tradition. So, we can summarize the church’s core ministries as *witness*, *worship*, *word*, and *welfare*. Let’s imagine every family, parish, and school/program as fulfilling each of the four, and doing so with a catechetical consciousness.

Family

The family should function like “a domestic church” (Vatican II, *Constitution on the Church* #11). Thus, it should carry on all the church’s ministries—in its own way. So, it can reflect on God’s *word* at intentional times of sharing faith (e.g., talking about the Sunday readings or homily). Beyond this, however, through the conversation of the home, and especially as life’s great questions and issues emerge, the family must carry on its ministry of the word at all “teachable moments,” occasional or prompted. Likewise, the family must reflect a life of *witness* to Christian faith, nurturing each other in its values and virtue. And every family should have its home *liturgy*, with its own religious rituals, symbols, and prayer patterns (before and after meals, morning and bedtime, etc.). Then, to catechize well, the family must practice the works of compassion and justice, both inward and outward.

Parish

The parish must give all its members “easy access” to God’s *word* through Scripture and tradition (Vatican II, *Constitution on the Liturgy* #22) by its preaching and formal programs of catechetical education. Beyond this, however, the parish needs to be a *witnessing* community of Christian faith, hope, and love if it is to catechize effectively. It must review every aspect of its liturgy for what it teaches; nothing that a parish does is more catechetical than how it *worships*. And its ministry of *welfare* must carry on the works of compassion and justice in ways that educate in faith. As a parish reaches out to the poor and marginalized, as it participates in the social struggles for justice and peace, it is most likely to effect lifelong faith formation.

Formal Programs

While every family and the life of the parish should practice the principles of TCC, there must also be formal programs of reflective education in faith (more below) that stretch across the life-cycle and lend ample opportunities for both age specific and intergenerational catechesis. The formal programs

(basal catechesis for grade and high school students, youth and young adult ministries, RCIA and Bible study, etc.) should engage people as active participants in reflective catechetical education. While these programs should not depend upon the liturgy and lectionary for their scope and sequence, there should be a deep resonance and partnership between the liturgical and catechetical ministries of a parish. However, I add that formal catechesis must be in partnership with all the parish ministries—not just liturgy. And the formal programs themselves should give people opportunities to practice their faith through works of compassion and justice, to reflect the values and virtues of Christian community throughout their ethos, and offer opportunities for shared prayer and worship.

School

The same can be said of a Catholic school. Its catechetical curriculum is its explicit education in faith, but the implicit curriculum of the school also pertains to its catechetical effectiveness. Without trying to replicate a parish, the school must promote genuine Christian community, have its own liturgical life and spiritual opportunities (retreats, etc.), and encourage the works of compassion and justice, both within the school and in its social context.

Curriculum and Settings

In a summary way, the curriculum and settings of TCC is the shared life of the parish, the family, and the program/school. As these settings work in coalition, each intentionally carrying on, in its own way, the ministries of word, witness, worship, and welfare, their life in faith together is the catechetical curriculum. And beyond the socialization of Christian identity, the teaching/learning process of TCC can be best named as “conversation,” of sharing faith together.

This being said, every parish needs its formal programs of catechesis and its designated catechetical leaders. Many may be familiar with *Generations of Faith*² with its monthly extended meetings of shared food, prayer and ritual, its intergenerational and age specific curricula, its take home resources for family follow-up, and its strong correlation with the liturgical seasons and lectionary. This is an imaginative way to organize the programmatic of TCC and many parishes are finding this model or some adaptation of it to be effective.

I’m convinced, however, that the principles of TCC transcend the programmatic and must be honored throughout and beyond any particular

program. So, every parish and especially its designated ministers must develop a catechetical consciousness about its shared life and ministries. Likewise, all parents must be proactive and intentional in their role as the primary religious educators of their children. Far beyond “dropping them off” at some parish program or school, parents must constantly attend to the ethos of their family for Christian values, enact their home rituals and prayers, model and encourage the works of compassion and justice, and take every opportunity to share their faith with their children. Likewise, parish or school programs of catechesis must reach far beyond—without leaving behind—instruction in the faith of children, and become programs of lifelong faith formation, information, and transformation.

When designing the formal catechetical curriculum, a parish, family, and program or school must commit to teach the whole story and vision of Christian faith. By this I mean that it should teach the constitutive truths, worship, and ethics of Christian faith and what it means for and asks of our lives. Further, every curriculum should reflect a scope and sequence that is age appropriate—suited to participants from preschool to the golden years. This is best achieved by what Jerome Bruner called a spiral curriculum; in other words, one that ever teaches the core themes of Christian faith in language understandable to every age group, and yet ever deepening and expanding as the years go by. Though the basal curriculum cannot be determined by the liturgical season and lectionary—because these cannot teach the whole story and vision of Christian faith and in age appropriate ways—every catechetical curriculum should echo and correlate with the liturgy. Further, a lectionary-based curriculum can certainly be ancillary to the basal one.

I said at the outset that lifelong formation in Christian faith requires both intentional socialization and *reflective education*. TCC certainly encourages intentional socialization in Christian identity; however, this alone is not likely to sponsor people beyond a conventional faith. A socialized faith alone would tend to limit a person’s horizons to “the village.” Beyond intentional socialization, TCC must also provide a critically discerning and consciousness-raising pedagogy that is likely to bring people to religious literacy and a thorough understanding of Christian faith, to be personally convinced of its constitutive teachings, to appropriate its spiritual wisdom as their own, and to be informed, formed, and continually transformed to integrate their faith with their daily lives. So, in addition to intentional socialization, TCC must

include reflective catechetical education as well. As I said above, “it takes a village with a school”—of some kind.

Teaching-Learning Process

For many years I’ve been attempting to articulate such a pedagogy. I have called it a “shared Christian praxis approach,” though its dynamics can be more patently described as “bringing life to faith and faith to life.” Its constitutive components are a community of conversation and active participation in which people reflect together with discernment on their own life in the world and on their socio-cultural realities, have access together to the spiritual wisdom of Christian story and vision, and are encouraged to personally integrate these sources—life and faith—as lived Christian faith toward God’s reign. And though I write about it as Christian—reflecting my own faith community—it can well be enacted as a shared Jewish or Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu or world religions praxis approach as well.

Many influences have encouraged me in such an approach, not least of which was the pedagogy of Jesus throughout the gospels. Note that the *General Directory for Catechesis* urges religious educators to imitate “the pedagogy of Christ” (#140), taking Jesus as “the convincing model for all communication of the faith” (#137). We can observe Jesus’ pedagogy at work throughout his public ministry but especially in his use of parables. There he begins by prompting people to look at and reflect upon the ordinary and everyday of their lives; he uses this “present praxis” as an entrée to teach his gospel message “with authority” (see Mk. 1:22); then he invites them to take the good news into their lives and to follow as disciples. In no instance is this pedagogy more demonstrated than in the story of the stranger and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Lk. 24:13–35). Note how the Risen Christ walks along with them and engages their lives, invites them to tell and reflect upon “all that had happened,” reminds them again of the story and vision of their faith, waits for them to see for themselves, whereupon they choose to return to Jerusalem to live discipleship in the midst of the community. I elaborate such a shared Christian praxis approach as a focusing activity and five “movements.”

Focusing Activity

Here the educator’s intent is twofold: 1) to engage people as active participants in the teaching-learning event, and 2) to get participants to focus on a

curriculum topic that is of real interest to their lives and/or faith.

Movement One: Expressing the Theme as in Present Praxis

The educator encourages participants to express themselves around the generative theme, symbol, or text as reflected in their present praxis. They can express what they do or see others doing, their own feelings or thoughts or interpretations, or their perception of what is going on around them in their socio-cultural context. Their expressions here can be mediated through any means of communication.

Movement Two: Reflecting on the Theme of Life/Faith

The intent here is to encourage participants to reflect critically—discerningly—on what they expressed in movement one. Critical reflection can engage reason, memory, imagination or a combination of them; such reflection can be both personal and socio-cultural.

Movement Three: Accessing Christian Story and Vision

Here the pedagogical task is to teach clearly the Christian story and vision around the particular theme, symbol, or text, and to do so with integrity and persuasion. The key is that people have ready access to the spiritual wisdom of Christian faith around the theme and to what it might mean for their lives—both story and vision.

Movement Four: Appropriating the Wisdom of Christian Faith

This begins the dynamic of moving back to life again with renewed Christian commitment (movement five). Here the pedagogy encourages people to come to see for themselves what the wisdom of Christian faith might mean for their everyday lives, to personally appropriate this wisdom and to “take it to heart” in who they are and how they live.

Movement Five: Making Decisions for Christian Faith

Here participants are invited to choose how to respond to the spiritual wisdom of Christian faith. Decisions can be cognitive, affective, or behavioral—what people believe, how they might relate with God or others, or the ethics and values by which to live their lives.

Though I outline these movements sequentially, they have great flexibility and many possible combinations. More important by far than the movements, however, are their under girding commitments. The focusing act reflects commitment to *actively engage* participants in the teaching/learning dynamic and with something *generative* for their lives. Movement one invites people to *pay attention* to their own lives in the world and to *express* their present praxis. Movement two reflects commitment to *critical (discerning) reflection*, encouraging people to think for themselves, personally and socially, to question and probe, to reason, remember and imagine around the life/faith theme, symbol or text. The commitment in movement three is to give people ready *access* to faith story and vision, and with persuasion, enabling participants to encounter spiritual wisdom for their lives. Movement four reflects commitment to *appropriation*, to encouraging participants to *integrate* their lives and faith tradition, to make its spiritual wisdom their own. And movement five invites people to *decision*, choosing a response to the spiritual wisdom they have encountered.

The Primary Agents of TCC

The communal, conversational and participative nature of TCC makes for a very egalitarian approach in which all Christians are responsible to participate according to their teaching/learning style. I reiterate: catechetics is the responsibility of the whole church. However, and like every function of ministry, it also needs its designated ministers to organize, resource, and facilitate it—to maintain its holy order. Beginning with the pastor, the whole parish staff must see their particular and their combined ministries as responsible for TCC. All parish ministers should have a catechetical consciousness that enables them to maximize the faith education opportunities of their particular ministry. So, the pastor can see to it that parish council meetings begin with a reading of the Sunday gospel and a ten-minute conversation by participants around the word of God they heard for their lives.

Then, the parish liturgist is a crucial agent of TCC. Of course, the primary function of liturgy is to worship God; to use liturgy to catechize in a didactic way is an abuse of liturgy. On the other hand, precisely because it is so symbol-laden, the liturgy, as Vatican II declared, contains “abundant instruction for the faithful” (*Liturgy Constitution #33*). The liturgist must see to it that the liturgical symbols and rites are enacted in ways that nurture people in lived, living, and life-giving faith. Likewise, the

music minister must be catechetically alert; what a Christian community sings goes to the hearts of its members. And so on for every parish minister; all must play their part in TCC.

Then, the ideal is that every parish have its own designated catechetical leader who has the theological and pedagogical formation for their specific ministry. This “director” (by whatever title) needs to recruit a whole cadre of volunteer catechists and see to it that they are well trained and sustained for their ministry. Given that TCC engages the whole community, such volunteers need more competence than ever, both theological and pedagogical, especially for their work with adults.

Such competence is a tall order for any parish, and especially for smaller ones with limited resources; yet, all must try to approximate the ideal. It is also true that smaller parishes have significant advantages over larger ones; for example, they likely already have a stronger sense of community—the very foundation of TCC. And we should always remember the ancient conviction that every Christian community has the charisms needed to carry on the full ministries of the church. TCC should be possible in every parish.

TCC at Work

I leave descriptions of parish-based programs to people directly involved in them. This being said, I favor multiple and varied models to implement the principles of TCC and repeat that fulfilling its principles is broader than any particular program. So, the once a month extended meeting that engages all participants in age specific and intergenerational catechesis is certainly one potential model. However, there could be many other formats, for example: a unified and parish-wide curriculum followed by different groups (children, youth, young adult, parents, grandparents, non-married adults), each in their own context and at their own pace; or some intense meetings of the whole parish in early Fall and Spring, with age specific meetings in between, and parents being the primary catechists in the home; or the more traditional parish programs (basal grade and high school, RCIA and faith sharing, youth and young adults, etc.), all meeting in their disparate groups but honoring the principles of TCC and meeting a few times a year in parish-wide gatherings.

Instead of pontificating on how such programs should be organized, here I will say something of what my spouse and I try to do intentionally in our roles as the primary religious educators of our son, Ted (age seven on January 4, 2008). I hasten to add

that this is more of a sample than an *example*—the latter would be to over claim for our efforts. After a late start in parenting, we try to be intentional in sharing our faith with Teddy and in nurturing his Catholic Christian identity.

Much of what follows will sound obvious but perhaps this makes a point. The problem is that when parents are told “you are the primary religious educators of your children” (Vatican II), they can hear “educator” as calling them to a schooling paradigm, as if we should sit our children down at desks, with textbooks and chalkboard, and give them didactic instruction. Some parents do home-school their children, but this is not what the church has in mind. The *General Directory for Catechesis* puts the priority on the ethos of the home. Rather than formal didaction, family catechesis is “a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing than structured into periods” (#255). I will follow the categories of ministry I’ve outlined above (witness, worship, word, and welfare); without being exhaustive, I indicate a few deliberate efforts we make under each heading.

By way of *witness*, Ted’s coming home to us has forced us to “clean up our act” in innumerable ways. Not that we do it perfectly now, God knows, but we do try to model the virtues and values that are core to Christian faith and to avoid the vices that are antithetical. This amounts to trying to live together as a small community of faith, hope, and love. We have found some decent and age appropriate religious art for his bedroom and for other parts of the house. We are active in our local parish, go to Mass as a family at least every Sunday, and we try to make this a happy family outing (e.g., hot chocolate afterward).

As *worship* we have developed a number of family rituals and prayer patterns. Since he was only a few days old, we’ve taken Ted to the window each morning, looked out, and said together, “Thank you Holy God for a good night’s sleep and a brand new day.” Now he does this himself every morning, bidden or not. On the way to school, we often play the game of looking in the passing scene for “one special thing to thank God for.” We do the usual grace before meals and the traditional Our Father (we often add Mother as well) and Hail Mary prayers. At bedtime, we are now into a practice that Ted seems to love; we ask him to remember three things that gave him joy and for which to thank God, and then three blessings to ask for.

As *word*, we try to take every opportunity, and especially when Ted asks the great questions (like “what happened to granny when she died?”), to share our faith with him. Indeed, not a day goes by

that we don’t have the occasion for some “God-talk” with Ted. And when he asks for a story at night time, I have a little leprechaun character (Finbar McGonigle) who loves to tell Bible stories; Finbar is so old that he remembers Jesus well and can fill in lots of “details” that the authors left out (like the name of the donkey that Jesus rode into Jerusalem). Another deliberateness around *the word* is our efforts to make the conversation and language patterns of our home those of respect and inclusion, never demeaning anyone but speaking respectfully of all people.

Some of our family efforts at *welfare* are having Teddy sort out the clothes and toys he has outgrown to pass them on to poorer children. We try to recycle and to reuse as much as possible and to explain why we do; he is now very conscientious about the environment (wonderful how this appeals to little kids). We encourage him never to waste food and I do what my mother did: remind him of all the poor and hungry children in the world (I’m sure there’s a better way but it worked on me). And Ted and I have recently begun to go occasionally on Sunday afternoons to a local Catholic Worker soup kitchen to help with brunch; he loves it and the guests love to see him come.

I’m sure many readers will have far better suggestions. My point is only that every family must devise its own preferred ways of being intentional about Christian witness, worship, word and welfare.

The Possibilities and Challenges of TCC

As already indicated, TCC invites every Christian person and parish, base community and family to a whole new consciousness about their vital function in the church’s catechetical mission, and asks that they be deliberate—proactive—in fulfilling it. Regardless of how TCC may be programmed, every Christian must honor its basic principles:

- that the ordinary and everyday relationships of life offer us constant opportunities to share our faith, and
- without imposing or disrespecting the faith of others, we must take advantage of those opportunities.

As we do so, we not only share our faith with others; we deepen our own as well. I have often begun a workshop with catechists by asking, “how many of you would say that your faith has been deepened by your efforts to share it?” Invariably, every hand in the place goes up. The gospel promise of a “one hundred fold” return is certainly true about

sharing our faith with others. And once people form the habit of sharing faith, this is likely to continue, nurturing their own lifelong faith formation.

The greatest challenge for TCC and lifelong faith formation is the complacency we have encouraged in people about evangelizing and catechizing; the church itself has encourage its rank-and-file to think that somebody else (priests, sisters, DREs, catechists, or whoever) will do this for them, in their stead. Now TCC truly represents a paradigm shift in consciousness and practice. Such shifts do not come easily and old ways die hard. That we have made so much progress over the relatively short life of this movement should give hope and renew our best efforts.

Beyond a profound shift in consciousness, TCC asks local parishes for some real investments in personnel and resources. Here I have particular concern about the diminishing number of priests and the consequent closing of parishes. Also ominous is the depletion of financial resources that deter hiring the kind of trained parish (and school) staff needed to implement and sustain such a program as TCC over the long haul. This is one reason why we need to put even greater stress on the role of the family, investing all the more in mentoring, training, networking, and resourcing families to fulfill their crucial function.

The challenges notwithstanding, TCC is a feasible approach to lifelong faith formation.

Endnotes

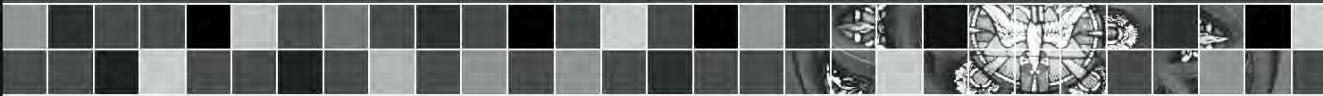
- ¹ I will often use this phrase to encourage commitment to the values of both catechesis and religious education; our catechesis for faith identity should reflect good religious education, and our Christian religious education should nurture people in faith.
- ² For more information about Generations of Faith go to www.generationsofffaith.org.

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Lifelong Faith Formation for All Generations

John Roberto

... the main task of handing on the faith is the whole community's task, carried out as members of the community gather together to sustain each other, go out and witness to, and even work to transform (when appropriate) the world in the name of Jesus, the Christ. (Terrence Tilley)

Over the past decade I have been engaged in developing an approach to congregational faith formation that is lifelong, ecclesial, and intergenerational. The theoretical foundations for this approach has been evolving since the early 1970s. The work of religious educators C. Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff, Charles Foster, Berard Marthaler, Francois D'Arcy Berube, Christianne Brusselmans, Maria Harris, and Catherine Dooley have provided a solid foundation upon which to build an approach to lifelong faith formation.

John Roberto is the editor of *Lifelong Faith* and president of LifelongFaith Associates. He works as a consultant to churches and national organizations, teaches courses in lifelong faith formation, conducts workshops across the U.S., writes and conducts research on lifelong faith formation. His latest publications include *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* (Twenty-Third Publications) and four volumes of intergenerational learning programs in the *People of Faith* series from Harcourt Religion Publishers. He was the founder of the Center for Ministry Development and the creator of the Generations of Faith Project.

This emerging vision of lifelong ecclesial faith formation has several defining characteristics:

- To utilize the whole life of the church as the faith formation curriculum through church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and liturgy, justice and service, prayer and spirituality, and community life.
- To engage all generations in more active participation in church life, especially Sunday worship.
- To develop an events-centered core curriculum for all generations in the church community, while offering age-appropriate programming to address specific life cycle learning needs.
- To involve all of the generations in learning the core curriculum together through intergenerational learning.
- To equip and support families, and especially parents, to practice the Christian way of life at home and in their daily lives.
- To transform the church community into a community of lifelong learners.

Maria Harris in *Fashion Me A People* captures the heart of an ecclesial model of faith formation when she writes,

... we can conclude that fuller and more extensive curriculum is already present in the church's life: in teaching, worship, community, proclamation, and outreach. Printed resources that serve this wider curriculum are in the treasury of the church, especially the comprehensive curricular materials designed over the last century in the United States. These, however, are not *the* curriculum. *The* curriculum is both more basic and more profound. It is *the entire course of the church's life*, found in the fundamental forms of that life. It is the priestly, prophetic, and political work of *didache*, *leiturgia*, *koinonia*, *kerygma*, and *diakonia*. Where education is the fashioning and refashioning of these forms in interplay, curriculum is the subject matter and processes that make them to be what they are. Where education is the living and the fashioning, curriculum is the life, the substance that is fashioned. (Harris, 63-65)

Faith formation is a **comprehensive** and **integrated** process that is much more than simply instruction. It incorporates 1) formation through participation in the life of the faith community, 2) education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, 3) apprenticeship in the Christian life, 4) knowledge of and intimate connection with liturgy and rituals, 5) development of a life of prayer, 6) moral formation in Jesus Christ, and 7) engagement in actions of justice and service.

This vision is brought to life through four essential practices:

1. an events-centered curriculum for all ages in the church community
2. an events-centered intergenerational learning process that incorporates preparation for an event, experience of the event, and application of its meaning in daily living
3. household faith formation involving learning, celebrating rituals, praying, and serving
4. collaborative, empowering, team-based leadership

This vision and four practices form the basis of the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation that my colleagues and I developed at the Center for Ministry Development. This essay briefly summarizes the vision and practices of this ecclesial, intergenerational approach to lifelong faith formation. I have written about this approach more extensively in *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* (Twenty-Third Publications, 2006).

Practice I. An Events-Centered Curriculum for All Generations

This ecclesial approach is centered in the events of church life. The Christian community is the primary communicator of the tradition and practices of the Christian faith through its corporate life. At the heart of faith formation is the forming and transforming power of the Christian community. Charles Foster (*Educating Congregations*, 1994) proposed an understanding of the faith community as the primary educator and that the events of church life served as the foundation for a curriculum. For Foster the life of the church is centered in events that have the power to educate and transform individuals and the community. He writes,

If these events are to become important to people, they must be familiar with them. If we want people to participate in these events and be transformed by them, we must help people understand these events and learn how to participate in them. Over time people begin to identify with the events and take on their character. ... We discover ourselves in a community of people identified with that event. We begin to see the world through the perspective of the community originating in and shaped by that event. ... These events not only tell us who we are, but also to whom we belong. They provide us with clues about how we are to

relate to others and to participate in the world around us. (Foster, 38)

Foster identifies four kinds of events in the life of the. These events become the basis of a lifelong curriculum.

- **Paradigmatic Events.** The patterns for Christian life and community have their origin in significant events deeply rooted in our tradition. The central paradigmatic event or pattern is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the paschal mystery. This event establishes the framework for the Church Year and the liturgical life of the parish. Paradigmatic events provide a persistent structure that gives order and purpose to our common lives.
- **Seasonal Events.** Our participation in the narrative structure of paradigmatic events occurs through a series of *seasonal events* that gather us up into repeated activities of telling and retelling, interpreting and re-interpreting, embodying and reenacting the stories associated with them. The Church year feasts and seasons help to provide a rhythmic pattern for the life of the parish. The ritual processes that structure these events carry the church through the liturgical seasons from Advent through Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, through the calendar of saints’ days, and through local seasons and ethnic traditions. Whether liturgical or nonliturgical, seasonal events order and move the life of the community through the year. Everyone participates; everyone benefits. These events provide the clearest and most consistent structure for the education of a parish community.
- **Occasional Events.** Occasional events intensify community identity and mission, illuminate community meanings, and energize community life. These events, such as the celebration of a baptism, a wedding, a funeral, a church dedication, or a special mission project, provide other occasions for telling other kinds of stories integral to the paradigmatic gospel story that gives the parish its reason for being. These events include the celebration of the sacraments (Eucharist, Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, Ordination), funerals, commissionings, birthdays, and anniversaries. They also include actions of justice and service and community life events. The participation of people in these events is heightened and the

significance of these events is enhanced when people prepare to participate in them.

- **Spontaneous Events.** These events surprise the faith community with unexpected opportunities to rehearse and renew its participation in the meanings of ancient events and their stories. These events bring joy and sorrow, blessing and suffering. Spontaneous events come in many forms—a changing population in the church or neighborhood, the loss of a pastor, the destruction of the church building by fire, the construction of a church building, among a myriad number of other possibilities.

Application: Core Curriculum

The events of the Christian community—church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and liturgy, justice and service, prayer and spiritual traditions, and community activities—are the **core** curriculum for the entire community, all ages and generations. In the words of Maria Harris, “The church does not have an educational program; it is an educational program.”

Churches fashion a **core** faith formation curriculum which systematically and comprehensively presents the Christian faith through the events of church life. The goal is to develop a common curriculum which immerses *everyone* more deeply into the Christian faith and into the lived experience of the Christian community. One approach that Catholic parishes utilize is to organize the events of church life into a six year curriculum incorporating 1) church year feasts and seasons, 2) creed, 3) sacraments, 4) morality, 5) justice and service, and 6) prayer. (This reflects the major themes of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.) Other churches utilize Sunday worship and the three year cycle of lectionary readings as the core curriculum.

The six curriculum themes and their events form a spiral curriculum that immerses people more deeply each year into the Christian faith. This provides foundational catechesis that is continuous throughout life—all six themes are offered on a six year cycle, and the cycle continues to repeat through life. The fundamental unity of the church is strengthened by establishing a core curriculum for all members of the community.

The events-centered core curriculum is designed for the whole Christian community, supplemented by age-specific programs for children, teens, and adults. For example, churches offer monthly intergenerational learning sessions on the core

curriculum for the whole faith community, and then throughout the month they offer age-specific programming for a variety groups. 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.

Curriculum Examples

Here is an example of a one-year curriculum that explores “Jesus and Discipleship” through church year feasts and seasons. This example makes clear the intimate connection between learning, Sunday worship (with a special focus on the lectionary), and the liturgical seasons.

Jesus and Discipleship Curriculum Example

Advent-Christmas	Birth of the Messiah
January-February	Called to Discipleship (Lectionary Readings)
Lent	Living as Disciples: Praying, Fasting, Almsgiving
Holy Week	Death of Jesus
Easter Season	Resurrection of Jesus
Pentecost	Sent Forth on Mission
Summer & Fall	Growing as Disciples (Lectionary Readings)

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, churches can prepare the community for a justice and service project, such as helping to feed and clothe the poor in a community, with an intergenerational program on poverty and the needs of the poor; or celebrate the national holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr., by conducting an intergenerational program on racial equality or peace and nonviolence, and then engage everyone in an action project; or 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.

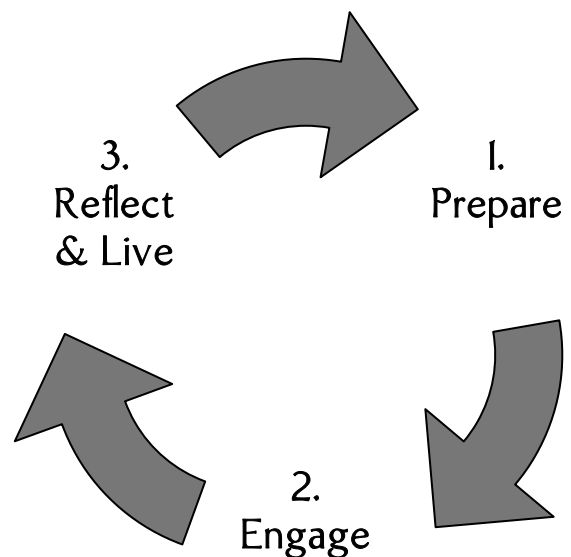
Here is an example of a one-year curriculum that explores “Acting for Justice” through Sunday worship and the lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, and local and global justice events and service projects. Each event leads to an action project.

Justice and Service Curriculum Example

Advent-Christmas	Being a Peacemaker (“The Prince of Peace”)
M.L. King Jr.	Respecting Human Dignity —Confronting Racism
Lent-Almsgiving	Serving the Poor and Vulnerable
Earth Day	Caring for God’s Creation
Pentecost	Being in Solidarity with People around the World
Labor Day	Protecting the Rights of Workers
World Hunger Day	Feeding the Hungry
Election Day	Justice for All
Human Rights Day	Human Rights and Responsibilities

Practice 2. Events-Centered Intergenerational Learning

The learning process for events-centered faith formation involves: 1) *preparing* people of all ages to participate meaningfully and actively in the church event that is the focus of the curriculum through intergenerational learning; 2) *engaging* people in the event—Sunday worship, sacraments, church year feasts and seasons, justice and service projects, prayer and spiritual traditions, and/or community activities—so that they can be formed and transformed by their participation; and 3) guiding people in *reflecting* on the significance and meaning of their learning and participating, and *empowering* them to *live* their faith at home and in the world.



Application: Intergenerational Learning

The key to educating the whole community is intergenerational learning—bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other. The intergenerational learning model integrates learning, building community, sharing faith, praying, celebrating, and practicing. It is for all members of the community—young and old, single and married, families with children and empty-nest families. It involves the whole family in learning together. It equips individuals and families with the knowledge, skills, and faith-sharing activities for learning and practicing faith at home.

Building on the work of a number of authors, especially James White (*Intergenerational Religious Education*, 1988), my colleagues at the Center for Ministry Development (Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber) and I developed a model of intergenerational learning based on White's four patterns, which is being used by Catholic parishes in the Generations of Faith Project and in the intergenerational sessions for the *People of Faith* series (Harcourt Religion). (See the new book *Intergenerational Faith Formation* in the Resources section.)

In this model intergenerational learning is designed around a four movement learning process.

Welcome, Community Building and Opening Prayer

1. An **All-Ages Learning Experience** for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
2. **In-Depth Learning Experiences** that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) *or* for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format*: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format*: learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format*: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
3. An **All-Ages Contributive Learning Experience** in which each generation teaches the other generations.

4. **Reflection** on the learning experience and interactive group sharing and preparation for applying their learning to daily life using the household resources.

Closing prayer

Example: Justice and Solidarity

All Ages Learning Experience

1. Activity 1. Where Are You From?—tracing each individual or family journey to the U.S.
2. Activity 2. If the World Were a Village of 100 People

In-Depth Learning Experience: Age Group Format

1. Activity 1. How Are We Connected to People around the World?
 - Family Activity: What's Inside Your House? (from around the world)
 - Adolescent and Adult Activity: What's in Your Life? (from around the world)
2. Activity 2. The Journey of Interdependence
 - Option 1. The Journey of the Chocolate Bar (all ages)
 - Option 2. The Journey of the Banana (all ages)
 - Option 3. The Journey of Coffee (teens or adults)
3. Activity 3—Presentation: Solidarity through Fair Trade
4. Activity 4. What do the Scriptures and Church Teachings Say about Solidarity?
 - Activity: The Good Samaritan for Today
 - Activity: Who Do We Need to Be in Solidarity With?
5. Activity 5. How Can We Build Solidarity among People?—Developing Action Projects

All Ages Contributive Learning Reflection and Application

(For the complete learning design see *Acting for Justice* by John Roberto, Harcourt Religion, 2005.)

Practice 3: Household Faith Formation

An integral element of events-centered faith formation is equipping households to integrate the Christian faith and values into the fabric of home life, learn the Scriptures and the Christian tradition, pray together and celebrate rituals as part of the pattern of daily and seasonal home life, care for each other and those in their community, and work for justice and serve those in need locally and globally.

The congregation takes the initiative in nurturing the faith of families/households and empowering them to live their faith at home and in the world through four strategies.

1. *Intergenerational Learning*: By participating in intergenerational learning, families have a shared experience of learning together, sharing faith, praying together, and celebrating rituals and traditions and are equipped to share faith at home. This is a great opportunity to model and demonstrate faith practices that families can live at home.
2. *Household Faith Practice*: Through home activities developed specifically for the event, individuals and families are given resources that assist them to live their faith at home.
3. *Participation in Church Life*: By participating in Sunday worship and the church events that are the focus of the curriculum, the faith of individuals and the whole family is strengthened and deepened.
4. *Household Faith Reflection*: Through reflection activities, families and individuals are given the resources to reflect on the meaning of their participation in the event, to connect it to what they learned at the intergenerational program, and to reflect on how to live their faith.

One way churches connect the intergenerational learning program and people's participation in the church event to the home is through a home kit of resources and activities for the whole household, as well as for individuals of different ages. Here are home kit ideas for the Justice and Solidarity session described previously.

- *Learning*: a contemporary map of the world, Scripture readings and reflections on the Bible's teaching on solidarity, stories of people from around the world, *If the World Were a Village—A Book about the World's People* (children's book), drawing activities for children

- *Service*: a "how to guide" for purchasing fair trade items (coffee, chocolate, food), solidarity action projects with descriptions of local, national, and global projects, raising funds to support action projects
- *Prayer and Rituals*: weekly table prayers for solidarity, table placemats with prayer petitions for people's needs around the world, eating a simple meal each week and giving the money to an organization that serves the needs of the poor

Practice 4: Collaborative, Empowering, Team-Based Leadership

Lifelong faith formation requires a *collaborative* and *empowering* style of congregational leadership. This style of leadership needs to be present not just in one person, such as the pastor or religious educator. It needs to be present in the leadership style of the entire staff and teams responsible for fashioning, implementing, and facilitating lifelong faith formation. Since lifelong faith formation is related to every aspect of community life, it requires collaboration among all the various leaders and ministries in a congregation. Teamwork and collaboration are essential for effective planning and implementation.

Research with churches implementing an events-centered, intergenerational approach to lifelong faith formation points to several important leadership practices that make for effective implementation of lifelong faith formation:

- the participation and investment of the whole staff and ministry leaders in lifelong faith formation, not just those involved in faith formation
- the active support and involvement of the pastor in lifelong faith formation through encouragement, an empowering style, a long term commitment, and advocacy.
- the presence of a coordinator who fully understands the vision and can work with others to implement it
- effective teams that have a shared vision for implementation and practice teamwork and collaboration
- a large number of committed volunteer leaders who are engaged in a variety of roles in lifelong faith formation including planning, teaching, organizing, and supporting.

- volunteer leaders who are empowered and trusted to take responsibility for key aspects of the implementation of lifelong faith formation
- concerted efforts to integrate lifelong faith formation with existing parish programs and ministries

Churches develop various leadership structures to implement lifelong faith formation. There are at least two important teams: the faith formation leadership team and the program implementation team. The *Leadership Team* which includes the church staff and faith formation leaders assume responsible for developing and coordinating the faith formation plan:

- promoting and communicating the vision of lifelong faith formation
- fashioning the lifelong curriculum
- developing the implementation plan for the lifelong curriculum
- developing leadership for lifelong faith formation: inviting people into leadership, providing training for leaders, and supporting leaders
- evaluating the implementation of the plan

The *Leadership Team* can also be responsible for designing the intergenerational program and creating/selecting household resources. Some churches develop a separate team that designs the learning programs and home resources.

The *Program Implementation Team* has the primary responsibility for conducting intergenerational learning programs. The *Implementation Team* includes people who will be directly involved in the organization and facilitation of intergenerational learning, and people who will be involved in administrative and support roles. A typical intergenerational learning program will involve a variety of leaders, such as:

- Program Facilitator
- Learning Group Facilitator: Leader for age-appropriate learning groups, e.g., families with children, young adolescents, older adolescents, young adults, adults
- Facilitators for age-appropriate learning groups
- Assistants to help with age-appropriate learning activities
- Prayer leader for opening and closing prayer
- Music leader and/or music team for prayer and activities
- Set-up and clean-up staff
- Food preparation and service staff
- Creative arts staff for artwork, posters, signs, etc.
- Promotion and correspondence staff

- Hospitality and registration staff
- Home kit staff
- Administration

One of the key roles in intergenerational learning is the Program Facilitator for a particular program. The Facilitator manages the team conducting the program and the logistics of the program, and facilitates the flow of the learning program. The Facilitator. . .

- works as a member of the Leadership Team to plan the intergenerational program and recruit leaders to conduct the programs
- participates in the design and preparation meetings for teaching the program
- manages the team and the various leadership roles necessary for conducting the intergenerational program he or she is leading
- welcomes all the participants and provides an overview of the learning program
- guides the whole group through each element of the learning program
- introduces each learning activity and the leaders; presents instructions as necessary
- keep the program moving on schedule
- facilitates the whole group sharing experience and at-home application at the end of the learning program

Conclusion

The quote from Terrence Tilly which began this article summarizes well the hopes and dreams of an events-centered, intergenerational approach to faith formation "...the main task of handing on the faith is the whole community's task, carried out as members of the community gather together to sustain each other, go out and witness to, and even work to transform (when appropriate) the world in the name of Jesus, the Christ." The approach I have described provides one way to take seriously the task of handing on the faith by involving the whole community in faith formation.

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1. Dignity of Human Life
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4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
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1. Love of God and Neighbor
2. Respect for All Lifelong Faith
3. Being Good Stewards
4. Living Faithfully
5. Being Truthful
6. Mercy and Forgiveness

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1. We Are Called to Pray
2. Catholic Prayers and Devotion
3. The Lord's Prayer
4. Praying through Advent and Christmas
5. Praying through Lent and Easter
6. Praying the Rosary



Practice Ideas

Example: Connecting Faith, Worship, and Life Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Acton, MA (www.seoh.org)

Based upon the Gospel and the call of Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessors for a new evangelization and stronger catechetical effort, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish uses a liturgy-centered, lifelong, and intergenerational approach to Catholic faith formation. The goal is to help and support everyone who wishes to become a better disciple by integrating faith, worship, and life in light of the Gospel. Since this is an ongoing, lifelong task, everyone in the parish is invited to participate.

What is Generations of Faith?

Generations of Faith is an innovative approach to faith formation that equips the parish to become a community of lifelong learning. Faith formation is centered in the events of church life, embraces all ages and generations, and promotes faith growth at home. Through worship, learning, service, and community, GOF offers whole community catechesis to support everyone's Christian journey no matter one's age or stage. A program of lifelong, intergenerational formation, GOF has three basic components, all of which are essential:

- The first and *most important* component of faith formation is regular and active participation at Sunday Mass.
- The second is the monthly intergenerational learning session.
- The third is a personal, daily effort to live as a good Christian, and to increase in faith, hope, and charity. This is how a faithful people makes its way back to God.

The key is to bring these three activities together such that each one supports and is supported by the other two. Faith formation requires us to bring faith, worship, and life together, and respond to the power and insight that emerges when we do that. The goal of faith formation is to know, love, and serve the Lord ever better and more fruitfully.

The Structure of Generations of Faith

The Generations program offers three means of catechesis. Each component is critical to the overall effectiveness of this method of faith development.

First of all, each month's formation theme will come from selected Sunday readings. The scriptures will provide the foundation for liturgical catechesis around each theme which will be developed through the music, homily, and prayers during Mass. Experiencing church life, events, and seasons through the liturgies is the source for the Generations formation approach. As formation sessions are designed to prepare and reflect on the readings from Mass, it is important to attend Sunday liturgies.

The second part of the Generations program is attending the monthly formation session.

Formation sessions will include comprehensive faith formation including the following:

1. Knowledge of the faith
2. Liturgical life
3. Moral formation
4. Prayer
5. Belonging to a community
6. Missionary spirit

Formation sessions will provide activities and content consistent with the readings and experiences in the selected Mass. Sessions will include a meal, large group activities, reflection, prayers, and instruction, and breakout sessions based on developmental levels. All households have been assigned to a particular formation session.

Finally, the third component of the Generations of Faith model is the home kit. The Catholic Church sees the family as "the domestic church," integrating home and parish into a comprehensive model of faith formation. The home kits are designed to help extend and expand the learning from the formation sessions and Masses. The goal is to create a pattern of family faith sharing that is integral

to family life and woven into the fabric of daily life. Home kits will include materials to enable the following:

- Celebrating traditions and rituals
- Learning the Catholic faith story
- Praying together
- Serving others and working for justice
- Enriching relationships and daily life

Generations of Faith 2007-08

The Curriculum

1. September: Mass for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Luke 15:1-32)
2. October: Mass for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Luke: 17:11-19)
3. November: Mass for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Luke 20:27-38)
4. December: Mass for the 2nd Sunday of Advent (Matthew 3:1-12)
5. January: Mass for the Baptism of the Lord (Matthew 3:13-17)
6. February: Mass for the 1st Sunday of Lent (Matthew 4:1-11)
7. March: Mass for Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11 and Matthew 26:14—27:66)
8. April: Mass for the 4th Sunday of Easter (John 10:1-10)
9. May: Mass for Holy Trinity Sunday (John 3: 16-18)

Monthly Program Schedule

1. Wednesday 5:30—8:00 p.m.
2. Saturday 6:15—8:45 p.m.
(kindergarten session offered)
3. Sunday-1 12:00—2:30 p.m.
(kindergarten session offered)
4. Sunday-2 5:00—7:30 p.m.

Intergenerational Program Model: Age Appropriate Learning Groups

The breakouts are subgroups that participate in developmentally-appropriate activities and instruction during the intergenerational learning program. They are designed to enhance parents' participation in their children's faith formation, build community among participants of similar age and experience, and promote the formational process in general. Most of the monthly sessions include breakout sessions.

1. Primary Level (Grades K-4) & Parents

Parents and children work together under the direction of trained leaders and facilitators to

explore each month's focus area. Large group, small group, and individual instruction are provided, but the parent serves as the primary catechist for each child. This level is designed for children in K – Grade 4. Younger children are welcome to come to be with their family, but there will not be specific catechesis for them. Additionally Kindergarten sessions will be only offered during the Saturday evening and the Sunday afternoon sessions. Grade 5 students and parents who are more comfortable working in this setting for part or all of the year are welcome to stay with their family. (All children preparing for First Eucharist register for both Generations of Faith and First Eucharist.)

2. Middle or Intermediate Level (Grades 5-8)

Middle grade children gather with group leaders to explore each month's lesson in a developmentally appropriate way. This may include reading, discussion, drama, hands-on activities, and/or service work. This level is designed for younger adolescents in grades 5-8. Parents are welcome to attend all or part of this session with their children or they may attend the adult session. It is required that a parent be on site during the entire GOF session.

3. Senior Level (Grades 9-12)

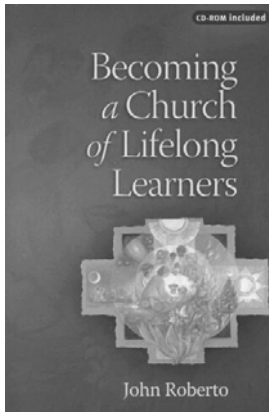
High school students gather under the leadership of the parish youth ministry coordinator and group leaders to explore the month's theme at a deeper and more personal level. The goals of this session include using the focus area as a call to spiritual development and service to others. Parents and/or Confirmation sponsors are most welcome to attend these sessions with their teens. This level is designed for older adolescents in grades 9-12. (All Confirmation candidates must register for both Generations of Faith and Confirmation preparation.)

4. Adult Level

Parents, couples, single adults, and retired adults gather to explore the focus area using techniques and processes that have proven effective for adult learners. Confirmed teens in grades 11 and 12, and/or young adults living at home are welcome to participate in the adult breakout session. (GOF registration is free for seniors 65 and older.)

Resources

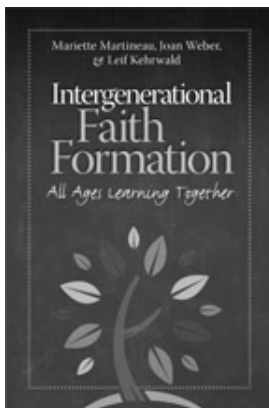
Lifelong Faith Formation



Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners

John Roberto (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006) [\$24.95]

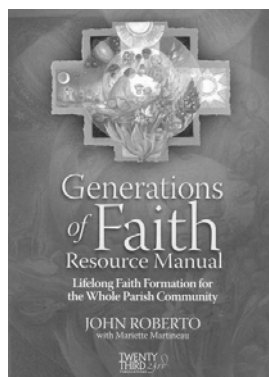
Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners presents the research, vision, and practices that provide a foundation for lifelong faith formation. The first chapter analyzes the social-cultural context and identifies important trends that are having an impact on faith formation today. Chapter two presents a vision of lifelong faith formation. Chapters three through six present the four essential practices that make lifelong faith formation a reality in parish life: 1) events-centered systematic curriculum for the whole parish community, 2) events-centered intergenerational learning, 3) household faith formation, and 4) collaborative and empowering leadership. This model of faith formation forms the basis for the Generations of Faith approach developed by the Center for Ministry Development.



Intergenerational Faith Formation—All Ages Learning Together

Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008) [\$19.95]

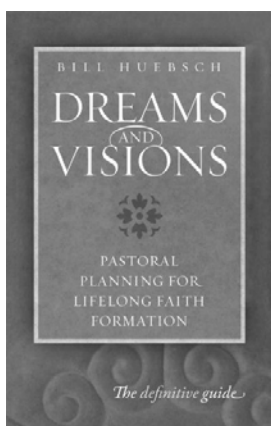
Written by the family and intergenerational faith formation team at the Center for Ministry Development, *Intergenerational Faith Formation* addresses the context and urgency for effective faith formation in the church today, and in light of key principles for effective learning, makes a compelling case for intergenerational learning as one of the ways in which people can best learn and grow in faith. Not only is there a place for intergenerational learning in faith formation, the authors believe there is a *necessity* for it. They show that intergenerational faith formation can help children, adolescents, and adults effectively identify with and integrate into the faith community because their learning and formation takes place in the context of the community—learning the way they live. The book describes the necessary elements for multigenerational learning, and explores the essential practices of intergenerational faith formation.



Generations of Faith Resource Manual—Lifelong Faith Formation for the Whole Parish Community

John Roberto and Mariette Martineau (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2005) [\$29.95]

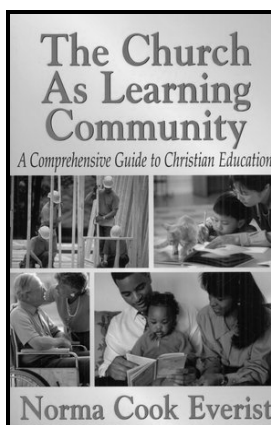
Specifically written to guide church staff and faith formation leaders, this guide to developing lifelong faith formation offers planning processes and practical tools for fashioning and implementing a lifelong curriculum and developing leaders for lifelong faith formation. It also offers processes and tools for designing intergenerational learning experiences and household activities. The book contains meeting outlines correlated to each chapter in the book and comes with a CD-ROM with PowerPoint presentations for each chapter as well as all the necessary worksheets and handouts to implement the process of lifelong faith formation.



Dreams and Visions—Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation

Bill Huebsch (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007) [\$14.95]

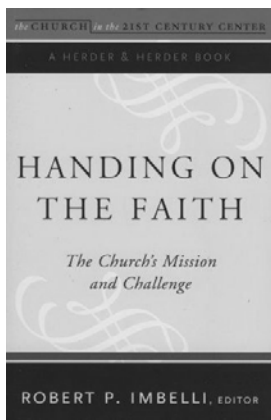
In *Dreams and Visions* Bill Huebsch offers a blueprint for lifelong faith formation for the whole community with the goal of helping all parishioners turn their hearts so fully toward Christ that a fire is lit in the heart of the parish itself. He offers a clear and consistent plan for step-by-step growth, with special emphasis on excellent liturgies, intergenerational gatherings, parish retreats, strong and effective catechist and teacher formation, and developing households of faith in every home in the parish. In this guide, he not only shows parishes how to get started but also how to keep going until lifelong faith formation is a reality. Chapters are organized into three sections: Essential Background, The Plan Itself, Getting It Done.



The Church as Learning Community

Norma Cook Everist (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) [\$29.50]

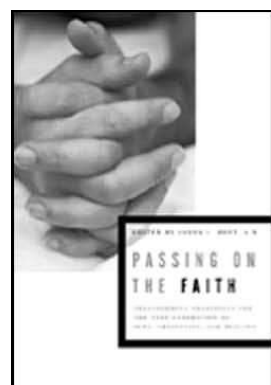
Norma Cook Everist contends that it is meaningful to say that in ministries of administration, outreach, and pastoral care, the church is functioning as a learning community. Whenever and wherever Christians are being formed into the image of Jesus Christ through ministry, there Christian education is taking place. Christian education is the name we give to that process of formation. Part 1 of the book focuses broadly on what it means to be the church in the world. Part 2 shows how being a learning community requires ongoing growth in faith throughout the span of life. Part 3 shifts focus to the church as it moves into the community and world.



Handing on the Faith—The Church's Mission and Challenge

Robert Imbelli, editor. (New York: Crossroads, 2007) [\$24.95]

Many of the leading thinkers and writers in American Catholic life focus on the question of how to pass the faith on to a new generation. What are the best means for conveying the faith, particularly in North America? The eleven essays in the book are organized into three categories: The Contemporary North American Context, The Content of the Faith Handed On, and Communicating the Faith. Terrence Tilley's essay, "Communication in Handing on the Faith" is must reading for all those in faith formation. Contributors include: Robert Barron, John C. Cavadini, Bishop Blase Cupich, William D. Dinges, Paul J. Griffiths, Thomas Groome, Michael J. Himes, Robert Imbelli, Luke Timothy Johnson, Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN., Christopher and Deborah Ruddy, Terrence W. Tilley, and Robert Louis Wilken. This is an essential book for all faith formation leaders.



Passing on the Faith

Edited by James Heft, S.M. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) [\$22]

Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims is an important new book that is the result of a 2004 international conference at USC, "Faith, Fear and Indifference: Constructing the Religious Identity of the Next Generation." The book includes original essays by international scholars that explore the challenges of passing on faith today, summary reports on three recent national studies of youth and young adults, and direction for passing on faith to the next generations of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The report on new research on young adults conducted at USC, "Congregations that Get It," is especially helpful.



The Emerging Vision of Lifelong Faith Formation in the Catholic Church

Bill Huebsch

A lot has been happening in the Catholic Church over the past seventy-five years regarding faith formation and the pastoral plan of the parish. Sometimes when things emerge slowly over a long period of time, it's hard to see their full impact. One sees only a small part of the whole, which can leave one lacking the full vision. Regarding faith formation in the Catholic Church, a great deal has been emerging. Slowly but intentionally over the past six or seven decades, the Catholic Church has been studying, discussing, praying about, and experimenting with catechesis. Leaders at every level have been reflecting on and creating new models for how we organize ourselves to pass on the faith from one generation to the next.

Even given all this, it can be difficult to see the whole picture. It is helpful, therefore, to pause and trace our growth. In order to make a contribution to this decades-long conversation, one must know what the speakers who came before us have had to say.

So, what's been happening? Who have these leaders been and what have they been saying? And what does all this mean for the local parish, for the parish catechetical leaders, and for families and households? As a leader, or volunteer worker, or pastor, or pastoral staff person, or bishop, or person sitting in the pews, how do you know what direction the leaders of the Catholic Church want us to follow?

We're going to do a quick survey of all that's been happening since the middle of the last century. But first, let's turn to "the back of the book" and look at the ending. What we find is that these have been the most dynamic and exciting years of renewal in the Catholic Church since the early centuries of the church's founding. These years have been ones of tremendous reflection and a convergence of thinking. At one and the same time, from many different sectors of the church, we have all come together in common thinking about catechesis.

Let me say first, though, that when we use the term "catechesis" we are referring to more than classroom teachers or catechists. We include in this term many other people. Youth ministers, for example, are catechists. Those preparing couples for marriage, or for the baptism of their child, or for confirmation—all of these are catechists. But beyond that, when a parish volunteer goes to visit an ill member of the parish, taking communion with him or her, what happens in that visit is terribly important. When she sits down on the edge

Bill Huebsch established the Whole Community Catechesis project in 2000, aimed at helping parishes and dioceses around the world implement the *General Directory for Catechesis*. As part of that project, he published *The GDC in Plain English*, *Whole Community Catechesis in Plain English*, and *The Pastor's Guide to WCC* (Twenty-Third Publications). His most recent book is *Dreams and Visions—Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation* (Twenty-Third Publications). He is the creator and the author of resources in the *Growing Faith Project*, an adult education resource based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

of the bed and invites the ill person to talk about their sickness, and about all the surrounding ramifications, that pastoral worker is a catechist. He or she is helping the patient make sense out of this illness, to understand the illness in light of faith, to grapple with the great human mystery of suffering, even with dying. Such work, to understand and find meaning in life and death – that’s a strongly catechetical ministry.

The same can be said about those who work in the funeral ministry, or those who visit the prison, or those who do outreach to the immigrant, the newcomer, the widow, the orphan, or the stranger. Catechesis is about much more than what happens to a child in the classroom. It’s about the whole parish, as a body working through its individual members, forming and shaping faith.

Parish catechetical leaders have also long understood the importance of the parents in faith formation. They know it’s impossible to be effective if the parents aren’t integral to their children’s formation. At the same time, church documents point to this same reality with great force. From the Second Vatican Council to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the parent is named as the primary player in the passing on of the faith from one generation to the next. And while parish leaders and bishops were saying this, Catholic lay leaders and publishers were getting ready a whole new generation of resources to make such a role for parents possible.

Tremendous renewal is unfolding now. So whether we’re speaking of children’s religious education, adult faith formation, the RCIA, pastoral care, outreach, or any other form of catechesis, we are in a period of tremendous renewal and reform. It’s always hard to understand the historic significance of the moment in which one lives. But history will look back on this moment, I think, and see a turning point. The whole church is re-enlivened by a more dynamic understanding of catechesis! The whole church is beginning to realize that the parish itself is the teacher, by how it believes and behaves. No longer merely an enterprise for children, now every member of the church is seen as being in formation throughout life, at every age and stage.

Remarkable, isn’t it? From every corner of the Catholic Church we’re all calling for the same development in faith formation. To me, it’s inescapable that the Holy Spirit is guiding this movement.

And this has been true in every dimension of catechesis. As we articulate the principles for catechesis that emerge from all the work of the past seventy-five years, we find that they are held in common by all: bishops, diocesan leaders, pastors,

parish leaders, and households themselves, who are responding to a new invitation to grow in their faith. This new sense of direction has the power to really effectively announce the reign of God, to provide a true spiritual home for people of all nations, and to chart the course for justice and peace that is the dream of the gospels.

Indeed, the strong work of the past seven decades provides a clear sense of direction for the church. But you will have to be ready to embrace the change in parish structure needed to bring this all about. Whatever role you play, whether you’re the bishop or a diocesan staff worker overseeing your whole diocese or a parish worker focused more directly on one community of that diocese, the work of implementing this bold new sense of direction, this bold new pastoral plan, falls now to us.

At the Council

On the eve of Vatican II, the pastoral plan of the Catholic Church seemed quite simple. Bishops and pastors provided all the leadership, while Sisters and Brothers handled the education and health care systems of the church. Lay people attended Mass weekly, followed the moral and devotional direction set for them by the leaders, and used the sacrament of confession to reconcile themselves if they went astray.

“Fallen away Catholics” were a small number, and were generally treated as lost souls.

Catechesis was based solely on the *Catechism* itself, where answers to specific questions of faith and doctrine were memorized along with prayers, lists, and other details of Catholic life. By and large in the United States, and many parts of the world, Catholics lived what was known as a “Catholic life.” Everyday life was imbued with Catholic customs, beliefs, and traditions. So much was this the case that “catechism class” (as it was known in some parts of the church) had only a very small gap to fill. The actual instruction was done through all the other means: home life, devotions, traditions, personal piety, fasting, abstinence, and obedience to church norms, and of course, weekly or daily Mass attendance.

The pastoral plan for parishes had remained essentially the same since the sixteenth century. There had been so little change, in fact, during those four or five hundred years that when the bishops and theologians at Vatican II did begin to reform the Catholic Church, it came as quite a shock to many people. Having been held in place for so long by the sheer force of the discipline of the church’s leaders and the threat of hell, that old “Catholic life” now

began to unravel and the need for a more vigorous catechesis became strong.

Here was Vatican II calling for “full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy.” Lifelong catechesis would be needed. Vatican II was calling for lay people to engage the world and contribute to it from their faith. Lifelong catechesis would be needed. Vatican II spoke about a “universal call to holiness.” Lifelong catechesis would be needed. Vatican II led us toward charitable and prayerful ecumenical and interfaith relationships and dialogue. Lifelong catechesis would be needed. Vatican II described conscience as the place “where we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths.” Lifelong catechesis would be needed. Vatican II restored the catechumenate, which had not been active in the Catholic Church for nearly seventeen hundred years. Lifelong catechesis would be needed. Vatican II restored our understanding of baptism as “the essential sacerdotal sacrament.” Lifelong catechesis would be needed.

Do you hear a theme emerging here? If indeed the church renewed by the Council was to become a reality, the secret strategy would be lifelong catechesis. At every age and stage of life, Catholics would have to grow in our faith. Gathering in multi-generational ways, Catholics would learn new ways to allow the liturgy, the social teachings, or the pastoral care work of the church to teach them what it means to be church in the first place.

But in fact, the Catholic Church did not have a tradition of catechesis when the Council convened. There were catechisms to memorize. Memorization is certainly part of any form of learning, but no one would seriously argue that it is sufficient to have mere cognitive recognition of doctrine and tradition. And these catechisms were aimed almost exclusively at children and “converts.” Again, no one is seriously arguing that it’s enough to address only the catechetical needs of children, ignoring everyone else.

There must also be a strong element of the emotive and intuitive. The heart must be committed to Christ if one’s faith is strong. We do not, after all, place our faith in the Catholic Church itself. The church is not God. And there must be formation for us all, throughout life.

So at Vatican II itself, not much debate about catechesis was held. The Catholic Church had long hoped to engage all adults in the catechetical process. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) was created as a “whole community” approach, intended to activate adults in the work of the church. But it had quickly become only a children’s program. Of course, we could count then on that so-called “Catholic life,” but after the Council in the United States and other parts of the

first world, social changes on every level caused that “Catholic life” to fall into steep, sudden, and unforeseen decline.

In fact, at the Council, the only direct reference to catechesis comes in article forty-four of the “Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.” There it calls for a series of “general directories” to be drawn up after the Council. These were to address, for example, the care of souls, the pastoral care of special groups, “and also a directory for the catechetical instruction of the Christian people in which the fundamental principles of this instruction and its organization will be dealt with....”

An International Catechetical Movement

The Council Fathers were aware that a catechetical renewal was already afoot throughout the world. The search was already underway for a better method than the questions and answers of the catechism. In the early 1900s, catechetical leaders meeting in southern Germany were testing new methods. They recognized that merely knowing facts about the faith was not the same as encountering Christ and hearing the gospel proclaimed!

The so-called “kerygmatic movement” of the 1950s went even further, moving us to recapture the spirit and vision of the church of the apostolic and patristic era. This movement added the element of “formation” to the memorized catechism. Learners received the proclamation of the gospel, the teachings of Jesus and the saving acts of his life, death, and resurrection.

This movement was based on “four signs” that were to be in balance if a proper understanding of the faith was to be the result:

- Liturgy
- Scripture
- Church teaching
- Witness of Christian living

Catechesis was no longer limited to instruction and to the classroom. Instead, it merged with liturgy, biblical study, and discipleship into an organic whole, just as it was experienced in the early church. We are grateful to Josef Jungmann, SJ (1889–1975), who taught pastoral theology on the faculty of the University of Innsbruck, for these insights, which are part and parcel of all effective catechesis today.

In the United States, Jungmann’s work was popularized by Johannes Hofinger (1905–1984). It

was mainly by Hofinger's efforts that a series of international catechetical study weeks were held in

- Nijmegen, 1959
- Eichstatt, 1960
- Bangkok, 1962
- Katigondo, 1964
- Manila, 1967
- Medellin, 1968

These study weeks anticipated Vatican II and continued during and after it. They influenced the Council itself. The Eichstatt week had particular influence as it laid out principles of liturgical and catechetical renewal. But it was at Medellin, Columbia, in 1968 that serious reflection on evangelization led to a new focus. It was seen during the week in Medellin that we cannot presuppose faith in members of the church. Baptism is no guarantee that people have come to encounter Christ and adhere to him and the church with their whole hearts.

Following on all of this, in 1971, the Catholic Church published the *General Catechetical Directory* which provided a framework on which a great deal of catechetical renewal was built. This directory reflected all the work done to that point at the various study weeks and at the Council.

This first general directory was enculturated in the United States by way of a pastoral message issued by the US Catholic bishops in 1972, called *To Teach as Jesus Did*, which provided the impetus for much growth in catechesis in this country. In this document, the US bishops said, in article forty-three, "Today it is important to recognize that learning is a lifelong experience." The bishops were setting the stage for a new pastoral plan for the Catholic Church, one that includes more than children's religious education. They went on in this document to call for balance among all the elements of catechetical need within the parish: adults, youth, schools, children, and others.

Hmmm... balance. What would that look like for American Catholics, unaccustomed to catechesis for anyone other than children and youth? How would parishes balance their plan, retaining solid catechesis for the young while adding it for adults?

The bishops were laying the groundwork for an approach to catechesis that addressed more than children. Indeed, to be successful with the children in the first place, we know that their parents must be involved at every level of faith formation! Without the parents, all our efforts amount to "seed falling on rocky ground." Faith will sprout because of our efforts, but the real harvest of faith can only be sustained within the home.

Evangelii Nuntiandi

In 1974, an international synod of bishops dealt in great depth with the question of evangelization raised at Medellin, but they did not publish any outcomes. Instead, they encouraged Pope Paul VI to reflect on their findings, which he did, publishing an apostolic exhortation in 1975, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* or, in English, "On Evangelization in the Modern World."

The church received this document with tremendous grace. At the time, it was arguably the most important document issued in the Catholic Church since the close of Vatican II. It is concise (only five chapters long), vibrant, readable, and profound. In article four Paul VI posed his leading question: "At this turning point of history, does the Church or does she not find herself better equipped to proclaim the Gospel and to put it into people's hearts with conviction, freedom of spirit, and effectiveness?"

Notice this question. It is a thoroughly modern concern, rooted in today's situation. It is challenging. It is Christocentric and focused on the gospel, the *kerygma*. And it is powerful: do we have conviction? Is there freedom of spirit? And, mainly, are we effective?

Most importantly, this document marked a turning point for pastoral planners. Whereas in the past, the concern was for Catholics to be thoroughly familiar with the Catholic Church, its teachings, laws, liturgies, and traditions, now the concern shifts to something more Christocentric. For Catholics, do you know Christ? Have you experienced the life-changing power of an initial encounter with Christ? In other words, have you been "converted?" Conversion to Christ of this sort, the *General Directory for Catechesis* would later argue, precedes catechesis (article 62).

Christocentric Catechesis

This key turning point has led to decades of work on "evangelization." For Catholics, this is a difficult term. Catholics don't know much about conversion to Christ. And yet, if you examine the message of Pope John Paul II, you'll find him to be much more Christocentric than ecclesiocentric. Everywhere he went in the world—at clergy gatherings, in meetings of men and women religious, in preparation for the Jubilee Year, at academic meetings, youth rallies, or Masses for the throngs—his message was similar: "Come to Christ. Do not be afraid. Give your heart to Christ. Open wide the doors to Christ."

He saw Christ as the Lord of the universe and the center of all humankind. It was fundamental to him. I believe it was an insight that he himself gained through the Spirit.

In 1977, a second international synod of bishops met in Rome with catechesis as its focus, no doubt preparing to draw up that directory which had been called for at the Council. As the synod ended, the bishops issued a message to the people of God regarding their findings, and they also sent a set of resolutions to Pope Paul VI. Two years later, in 1979, Paul John Paul II issued the apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, or in English, “On Catechesis in Our Time.”

This exhortation laid the groundwork for a high level renewal of catechesis in today’s church. It begins by reiterating what Paul VI had said earlier, that catechesis is Christocentric and it is rooted in tradition. Evangelization is the overarching activity, and catechesis is one dimension of that. The main sources, as directed by Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, or in English, “The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” are Scripture and tradition. It also treats various practical aspects of catechesis and concludes by saying, in essence, that catechesis isn’t just for children; *it’s for everyone*.

And of course, once again, this document proclaimed that the definitive aim of catechesis is “to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ....”

And Finally, the GDC!

Then in 1997 the *General Directory for Catechesis* was published. Drawing on the wisdom and spirit of all the work mentioned above, and much that is not mentioned here for the sake of brevity, the GDC provides sound, workable principles on which to our current work in catechesis.

Whole community catechesis arises from the GDC. The name itself, “whole community,” comes from article 254 where it says, “The whole Christian community is the origin, locus, and goal of catechesis. Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community and invites [people] to conversion and the following of Christ.”

The *General Directory* laid out certain principles to follow, and these have led to the development of

- an understanding of the catechumenate as the model for all catechesis
- an understanding of the parish as the primary “educator”
- the centrality of an encounter with Christ as the basis for catechesis

- the key role households must play in catechesis
- a much stronger link between liturgy and catechesis
- an appreciation for intergenerational catechesis
- lifelong catechesis
- all catechesis leading to work for justice and peace

The US Catholic bishops have taken up both the spirit and the letter of the international and papal documents with great fervor. In *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (1999),” the bishops said:

We, as the Catholic bishops of the United States, call the church in our country to a renewed commitment to adult faith formation, positioning it at the heart of our catechetical vision and practice. We pledge to support adult faith formation without weakening our commitment to our other essential educational ministries. This pastoral plan guides the implementation of this pledge and commitment. (#6)

The US Catholic bishops join other conferences of bishops around the world in calling for adult catechesis to be the new norm in parish life. The church—leaders, workers, people—is seeking a way for parishes to bring adults into the circle of catechesis within each parish, to provide formation for the *whole community*. It is not a shift *away* from children. It is a shift to a wider circle, a more inclusive method which adults as well as children will appreciate.

Many Voices; One Vision

Swimming around and throughout this work at the papal and Episcopal level has been a set of parallel and vital developments. Leaders such as John Roberto, Jim DeBoy, Fr. Berard Marthaler, Tom Groome, Jane Regan, and Sr. Kate Dooley, OP, were leading the way into models of catechesis aimed at the whole community. Their very practical work was met with a warm welcome at the parish level of the church, where catechetical leaders were eager to experiment with methods to reach adults. Let’s review what these leaders have been saying.

Francoise Darcy-Berube, writing in *Religious Education at a Crossroads* asked this powerful question:

How can we provide a diversified, flexible, and ongoing support system for the development of a quality Christian life in the young of our communities, in their families, and in the adult population? [How can we provide] a much closer,

personalized, diversified and lasting cooperation with the families of these youngsters, and a more efficient support network made up of meaningful, personal, inter-generational relationships and of a variety of small intentional communities within the larger community? (20–21)

At the same time, Sr. Kate Dooley was making a connection with liturgy. She wrote that “Catechesis is gradual and ongoing; it takes place in and through the Christian community in the context of the liturgical year and is solidly supported by celebrations of the word.”

Dick Reichert, formerly of the Diocese of Green Bay, laid out the challenge in the National Conference of Catechetical Leaders (NCCL) newsletter *Update*, published in April 1994, when he wrote, “The real challenge contained in the pursuit of alternative models is to create a radical new paradigm of catechesis. It cannot simply be a process of going back to the past or making surface modifications of the present models.”

Echoing the strong, new, and urgent need to help those being catechized also be evangelized, Chris Weber wrote: “The baptismal catechumenate is first and foremost about bringing participants into relationship with Jesus Christ and helping them turn to him with their whole hearts. Is this task the first priority of the catechetical programs in our parish or school?” (*Catechetical Leadership*, vol. 12, no. 2).

And Fr. John Hurley, CP, now the director of the National Pastoral Life Center in New York, said this: “Why do catechists catechize? It is not just to transfer knowledge and teachings. It is to call others to be witnesses and disciples of Jesus Christ. Of course, this requires that our catechists be witnesses and disciples....If catechists have not experienced an encounter with Jesus, then how can they “talk the talk” with other people?...If they *have* encountered the Lord personally, then they can’t keep that a secret.”

Meanwhile, John Roberto was busy gathering a team and launching a movement for intergenerational catechesis with the Center for Ministry Development. Called “Generations of Faith,” this approach was a resource to help parishes accomplish the goal of allowing the parish itself to become the teacher. He wrote, “The current programmatic and age-specific approach to childhood and adolescent faith formation that has characterized the efforts of so many parishes over the past thirty years, is simply not adequate. It may be one of the models of faith formation in a parish, but it cannot be the only model. It is time to broaden our vision and our practice.”

And echoing John, National Catholic Educational Association scholar Steve Ellair wrote:

“Hope for renewing an intergenerational vision and nurturing intergenerational learning is not beyond our reach. We are, by nature, intergenerational.... Our “school-mode” applications of religious education lead to more cognitively focused “classrooms.” This approach can lead to a de-emphasis on the affective and behavioral dimensions of learning and produce children who can recite prayers and church doctrine, but who have little or no commitment to church...Intergenerational learning is by nature experiential and relational.”

Catholic publishers were likewise weighing in and adding to this growing consensus. Cullen Schippe, at a 1999 conference in La Jolla, California noted: “Catechesis has always been much more—oh, so much more!—than the handing down of doctrine. It has always been more than a body of categorized knowledge to be retained. The ultimate goal of all catechesis, after all, is adult Christians of mature faith.” Peter Phan, at that same conference, reminded the audience that “You cannot talk about religious education except as a process involving the whole community.”

Maybe a pastor summed it up best. At a gathering to commemorate the anniversary of *To Teach As Jesus Did*, Monsignor Richard Burton, pastor of St. Anthony Parish in Washington, DC, and a pioneer in lifelong catechesis, said simply and straightforwardly, “The parish is the catechist.” And the *General Directory for Catechesis*, published in Rome in 1997, agreed! Those to be catechized cannot be passive recipients, it said in article 157. They must be actively engaged in the process through prayer, participation in the sacraments, the liturgy, parish life, social commitments, works of charity, and the promotion of human values. Catechesis, after all, is a process of taking on *a way of life and personal conversion*, not the acquisition of a body of information.

It’s hard to find a scholar or publisher who does not agree. Dr. Gabe Moran, writing with his late wife Maria Harris in their seminal book *Reshaping Religious Education*, wrote: “Religious education...includes giving reasons and explaining. But it also includes teaching by communities in nonverbal ways and teaching by the nonhuman universe.”

Dr. Jane Regan of Boston College suggested that “Imagining an alternative vision of catechesis, one in which the adult community is invited into the process of transformation, is the first step that needs to be taken as we move into the next millennium.”

John Paul II himself reminded us that “Catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel

responsible and wish to be responsible” (*Catechesis Tradendae*).

As Catholic publishers began to understand and embrace the shift toward lifelong catechesis, they became leaders as well. Diane Lampitt, president at Harcourt Religion Publishers, wrote this recently: “Just as an artist needs the right tools to create a masterpiece, we as partners in ministry need the right tools for engaging the whole community in lifelong catechesis.”

And finally, just to round out this quick and incomplete survey of growing consensus, here is how Sr. Edith Prendergast of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and a pioneer in lifelong faith formation, puts it: “Foundational to all of this is an ecclesiology of communion. We are called to a *communio* of ordered relationships....This brings us to understanding the parish as a web of interlocking relationships all focused on the community as a learning, questioning, celebrating, welcoming and evangelizing community of faith. Key to developing whole community catechesis is visionary and shared leadership that holds out promise, hope, and which inspires the new.”

Can you see patterns of agreement and convergence here? Each working from his or her own perspective, church leaders have joined mind and heart in a common cause, drawn together by the Holy Spirit and sustained by each other. The Catholic Church is making an historic turn to lifelong faith formation and catechesis, rooted in an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, and lived in the church.

And this, in turn, leads us to a new urgency for pastoral planning. What plan can we undertake that will deliver these goals to us? How will we at once sustain and improve children’s catechesis while also providing intense, systematic, and comprehensive catechesis for people of all ages within the parish? Indeed, this is the most vital question before us now!

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