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Volume 6.3

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Lifelong Faith Volume 6.3 – Fall 2012

Welcome to the Fall 2012 issue of **Lifelong Faith** on the theme of “Faith Formation in Adulthood.” With our new digital journal you will be able to download the journal, print articles, and share the journal with your staff and leadership team. This issue explores adult faith and spirituality, and presents effective practices for faith formation with adults. As always resources are included in each article and a resource review at the end of this issue.

The first article in this issue, **Spiritual Transformation: The Heart of Adult Faith Formation** by Tom Zanzig, presents his vision of adult faith formation, his model of spiritual growth, and tools and strategies that create the patterns and systems that are at the heart of Tom’s vision.

Adult Spiritual Formation: Nurturing Adults in Christ and for Others by Jim Merhaut offers an approach to adult spirituality reflective of the most current thinking, and then provides practical strategies for nurturing spiritual maturity.

Janet Schaeffler’s first article, **A View from the Community: What Are We Learning About Faith Formation**, draws upon Janet’s research, nationally and internationally, on effective practices in adult faith formation by presenting signs of growth (effective practices) and challenges for the future adult faith formation.

In her second article, **The Challenges and Opportunities for Faith Formation with Maturing Adults**, she offers a profile of maturing adults today five elements for ministry and adult faith formation with mature adults.

Congregational Vitality and Older Adult Ministries by Richard H. Gentzler Jr. presents eight suggestions for helping vital congregations find creative ways of engaging, equipping, and empowering a growing older-adult population.

I hope this issue provides new insights and practices to strengthen your ministry and faith formation with adults of all ages.

John Roberto, Editor

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Spiritual Transformation: The Heart of Adult Faith Formation

Tom Zanzig

For the majority of parishes and congregations today, the renewal or reinvigoration (in some cases, resuscitation) of adult faith formation is considered a high priority. This is so for a painfully simple reason: when it comes to deepening the spiritual life and religious identity of adults, most faith communities are falling short if not failing altogether.

The causes of this deepening pastoral challenge are many and complex, including tectonic and well-documented cultural shifts. No need to rehearse those factors here, much less deny their powerful effects. Yet we can't use socio-cultural realities as cover for our own ineffectiveness. As pastoral leaders, we often exacerbate an already troubling situation by remaining trapped by counterproductive paradigms and mindsets—often at the insistence of ecclesial authorities who fail to recognize how radically the ministerial terrain has shifted.

One of our major adult faith formation mistakes, I believe, is that we focus far more on the transmission of content than on the transformation of persons. More specifically, our adult programming too often *starts* with a given body of content and inevitably moves toward such academic and educational issues as curriculum design, formats and schedules, methodologies, and content delivery systems. At some point, program developers may offer a comment or two, maybe even an essay or book chapter, on adult development, androgogical principles and techniques, and so on. But the common intent of such observations, it seems to me, is to figure out a way to make the already chosen content effective or at least palatable for our adults, many of whom we probably suspect are not all that interested in what we'll be offering.

Because our *AFF starting point* is content and, to a lesser degree, methodology, references or connections to the actual lived experience of the adults we are trying to serve get short shrift or

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lost altogether. Then we wonder why our adults either don't show up for what we offer or, if they do begin a program, often slowly drop out.

Put succinctly, I believe two major factors in the failure of most adult faith formation efforts are 1) our choice of starting points (content over persons), and 2) our preferred methods (education of the head rather than the spiritual formation of the total person). I advocate a radically different adult faith formation approach, one I have come to call, a little clumsily but descriptively, *community-based spiritual transformation*. I suggest that our ministry among adults will succeed only if we *start and stay* with their lived experience of the spiritual journey *and* if we use strategies and techniques that help people name, reflect upon, and share with trusted others their lives as disciples of Jesus.

This essay summarizes the foundational principles and components of my model and answers the common questions posed in many of my workshops and conversations: Assuming for now that I'm right in my basic position, what will that mean in terms of our actual programming? What does a "spiritual transformation model" of adult faith formation look like in the real world? How can we implement the model in a congregation or parish? These are legitimate and important questions. In this essay I try to answer them.

Core Values and Pastoral Principles

Sound planning, according to the Stephen Covey, "starts with the end in mind." Below are the values, attitudes, and pastoral principles that I think a parish or congregation must embrace if it is to minister effectively to and with those adults who are ready to grow as disciples. I present them as a covenant between pastoral leaders and the "engaged adults" of the community. As pastoral leaders we will do the following:

- Embrace the gift and responsibility of being a *particular* community of faith, uniquely called and sustained by the Spirit of God at this time and in this place.
- Remember that we nurture and support one another not for our personal growth alone but to fulfill the mission given the church by Jesus—to call forth and form genuine disciples who make real the Reign of God through evangelizing lives and loving service.
- Recognize and respect that each member of our faith community is engaged in a lifelong journey of faith and spiritual formation that is neither limited to nor solely dependent on parish life. The congregation is called to serve, nurture, and minister to the adults' unique journeys according to their needs—which at times may be minimal or even lead them outside the community.
- Challenge and equip our adult members to assume personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth and participation in the church's mission, with the assistance and support as needed of the community. (We adopt the motto of Home Depot: "You can do it, we can help.")
- Focus not on developing new *programs* (which will come and go) but, rather, on developing new *patterns of living* as a community of faith—ways of interacting, dreaming, creating, reconciling, worshipping and working together—as we establish *systems* of shared responsibility.
- Avoid preempting the work of the Spirit by prematurely naming our

goals, expected “outcomes, or “preferred future” (which often reflect a stronger commitment to business models than to the Gospel). We will remain open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit and resist the constant temptations toward power and control.

- Build on our community’s life-giving history and invite members to share their God-given strengths and talent; we will live as if we actually believe the Good News that the Spirit is working in and through *this* community of disciples right *now*!
- Accept that the primary responsibility of the congregation, and its most essential and effective ministry, is to offer rich and vibrant worship, without which genuine formation is impeded if not impossible. We acknowledge that everything in parish life flows from or builds on good liturgy. We also accept that a rich liturgical life may well satisfy the felt needs of a majority of adult members.
- Build the faith community “from the inside out,” not from the top down. We will listen, discern, dream, plan, and minister *collaboratively*, i.e., as a genuine community of disciples with a shared mission.
- Provide a warm, welcoming, and evangelizing environment for all members, while focusing our AFF energies and resources on those members who wish to actively pursue their growth as disciples.
- Call engaged adults to a covenantal relationship with their God, the community, and the world, a covenant they express through carefully discerned personal spiritual practices,

communal connections, and Christian service.

- Use available and emerging technologies to enhance and unleash the creative energies of the community and of its individual members.

Not a Program But a Pastoral Process

To move toward a spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation, I propose that a congregation engage in a thoughtful, prayerful, and patient three to five year *pastoral process* (which might then be repeated as needed) in which ***the process is the program***. We do not commit to interminable planning and meeting and building for some *future* goal. Rather, the way we proceed, the relationships we build, the tools we use, the talents and gifts we uncover and unleash—all are part of the patterns and systems that will anchor and sustain us *whatever emerges from our efforts through the grace of God*. In ministering to the spiritual formation of our adults, we will not prematurely identify our goals and then set out to “achieve” them. Such approaches may work for fundraising and building projects, but not for genuine “soul work.” We don’t know what our community will look like at the “end” of this process because there is no end. Our task and commitment is to remain faithful and open *now* to what the Spirit is *creating* among and through us.

The pastoral process I advocate utilizes strategies and tools that reflect the core values and pastoral principles described above. Leaders can mix-’n-match and sequence these in ways that fit their community’s current situation and needs. I must stress again: What I present here is *not* a “program.” Rather, the suggested tools and strategies reflect and *help create* the patterns and systems that are at the heart of my adult faith formation vision. *How* a parish or

congregation chooses to use these strategies and, more importantly, the results of their use will be unique for each congregation, because each community of faith is unique. The intent of this process is to discern, lift up, celebrate, and unleash the creative talents and gifts of *these* members in *this* place and time—all in service to the Reign of God. What emerges from the process may well surprise us.

1. A Model of Spiritual Growth

If the heart of effective adult faith formation is, as I have proposed, spiritual transformation, those engaged in the process must be able to name, reflect on, and comfortably share stories about and lessons learned from their spiritual life. Therefore, undergirding the community-based spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation is a theologically grounded but also accessible understanding of the spiritual life and the dynamics of lifelong spiritual transformation.

For two decades I have been working on a model of transformation that would, I hoped, not only help me make sense of my own journey but also help others understand and embrace their own life experience. Importantly, in an age of increasing secularization and the dramatic increase in the “nones” (not religious affiliated), who are now 20% of the U.S. population, I wanted to find a way to think about and interpret common life experience through the lens of Christian faith but absent the kind of religious presumptions and jargon that increasingly seem foreign, if not off-putting, to many people. What has evolved from that work is a way of understanding spirituality and religion that has been not only personally liberating but also enthusiastically embraced by those I’ve shared it with in presentations, workshops, and retreats.

Significantly, my model is universal; its basic components and principles connect to persons regardless of their age, culture or ethnicity, or religious persuasion. Even atheists and un-churched people have told me

the model helps them name and reflect more deeply on their lived experience.

Three illustrations provide visual summaries of three core elements of my theory of spiritual formation.

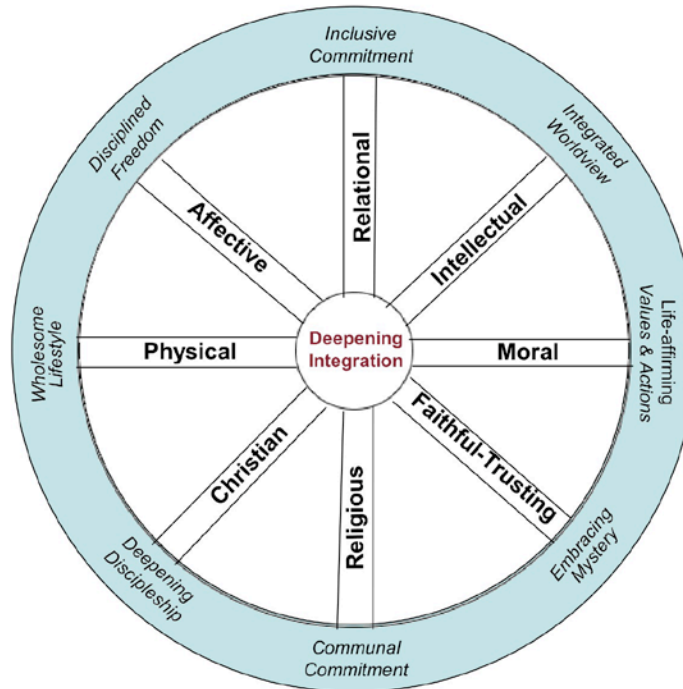
The ***Spiritual Growth Cycle*** offers an alternative to the common understanding of the spiritual life as a predictable, even programmable, linear process, an understanding that inevitably leads to misconceptions about our spiritual journey, the nature of God, and the meaning of life. Deceptively simple at first glance, the Spiritual Growth Cycle has for years given me a conceptual framework or roadmap for deepening study, personal reflection, and prayer.



The ***Spirituality Wheel*** suggests that the cyclic growth process unfolds within multiple dimensions of life and over time leads to our deepening integration as persons. (See next page.)

The ***Personal Discernment Tool*** provides a method for exploring life experiences within the framework of the Spiritual Growth Cycle. (See next page.)

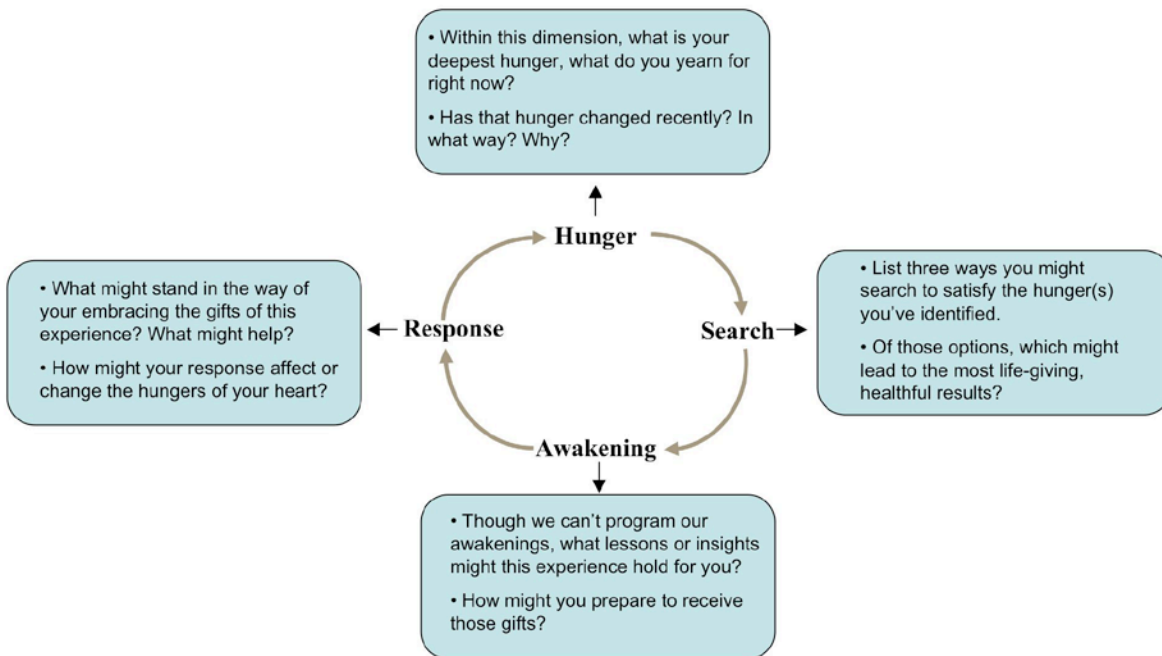
The Spirituality Wheel



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A Personal Discernment Tool

Note: This is a generic version of a tool that can be adapted for use with each dimension. It can also be used to reflect on and explore any event, situation, or personal issue within the context of spirituality.



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If you'd like more information about my model of spiritual growth, go to an interactive essay "Lifelong Conversion: The Dynamics of the Spiritual Life" on my website: http://www.tomzanzig.com/Site/Conversion_essay.html.

2. Appreciative Inquiry

Dr. Jane Regan of Boston College sums up effective adult learning with this rich and insightful observation: Adults learn best, she states, when they gather in conversation around things that matter. Every phrase of that statement is important. Many of the tools and strategies I advocate have deep conversation as their goal. Other strategies, like the components of my spiritual growth model, help adults reflect on and interpret their life experience so they have something to bring to the table (often literally) when they gather with others.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organizational change that offers powerful techniques for gathering adults in meaningful conversation. Most approaches to organizational change focus on naming problem areas, identifying root causes for the problems, then planning and implementing steps for eliminating or reducing the impact of those root causes. Because of their constant attention to problem areas, however, such approaches often drain energy and suck the life out of organizations and their leaders. By the time the problem is "solved" (it seldom is) no one really cares anymore. Yet most organizations repeat the same ineffective process over and over.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organizational change that focuses on and builds upon *positive, life-giving* experiences. Through directed interviews and other conversational strategies, AI surfaces activities, attitudes, experiences, and so on that give people hope and fuel a desire for deeper commitment to and engagement in the organization. The organization then seeks

ways to enhance, replicate, or expand upon those positive and energizing realities.

A brief introduction to AI is available in *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond. A more thorough but still accessible presentation of AI is *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, two pioneers in the management field. You might also look at the wealth of resources available on the Appreciative Inquiry website: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>.

The structured processes and practical strategies of Appreciative Inquiry can be used in multiple ways in adult faith formation and other programming. One particularly effective AI strategy in helping an organization grow and change quickly is the AI "summit." When used by corporations, universities, and other institutions, the summit can take as many as four days and result in detailed long-range planning. A more realistic and workable approach for congregations is to create one or more AI processes that can be implemented in one day (think "town hall meeting") or in a series of shorter sessions. A summit can focus energy on two key elements of my transformation model of AFF: rich conversation about things that matter by adults who gather together in a supportive and faith-filled community. In such a setting, the Spirit can work wonders!

I advocate using AI strategies to identify and then build on those elements of parish life that have demonstrably and reliably lifted the hearts and sustained the faith of the members. In other words, we don't begin by finding a prepackaged program that we then offer our members. Rather, our starting point is a kind deep listening to and purposeful conversation about things that matter to *these* disciples at *this* time. I would also hope that the operating principles of the AI approach would over time become standard practice for parish leaders, standing committees, and so on.

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle



Resources

- Hammond, Sue Annis. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Bend: Thin Book Publishing, 1998.
- Cooperrider, David L. and Diana Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005.
- Paddock, Susan Star. *Appreciative Inquiry in the Catholic Church*. Bend: Thin Book Publishing, 2003.
- Whitney, Diana and Amanda Trosten-Bloom. *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practice Guide to Positive Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003.
- Appreciative Inquiry Website:
<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>.

3. Gallup's Strengths-Finder and Engagement Resources

In recent decades, The Gallup Organization has conducted extensive research and developed and thoroughly tested tools for helping individuals identify their personal strengths and then helping organizations and institutions fully utilize and nurture those strengths—for the great benefit of both individuals and institutions. Initially their work focused on the corporate world. In recent years Gallup has applied the fruits of

that work to churches and other religious organizations. The connections between the Gallup work and my adult faith formation vision are potentially profound.

Gallup has developed resources in two independent but related areas:

Living Your Strengths (New York: Gallup Press, 2003) and *Strength Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007): These resources utilize an online, self-guided inventory to help individuals identify their dominant talents and name ways that they can “play to their strengths” in their relationships, career, family life, and now church. Gallup has identified 34 personal themes or potential strengths. The online inventory guides a user to identify his or her top five gifts, God-given potentials that together give one the capacity to not only make a difference in the world but also deepen their sense of personal value, wellbeing, and happiness. Like the AI philosophy, and a major reason I find it so attractive, this tool helps persons focus on the positive and life-giving aspects of their personality and life experience. Simply taking the “test” is a highly affirming and empowering experience.

Growing an Engaged Congregation (New York: Gallup Press, 2006): This book is subtitled “How to Stop ‘Doing Church’ and Start BEING the Church Again.” This is not a program, but an exploration based on solid research of what leads some people to be fully connected and committed to their congregations. Gallup uses the term “engagement” to name that connection. They claim it is possible to accurately measure levels of engagement in a faith community and then implement practical strategies to increase those measures over time, resulting in even dramatic growth in congregational vitality.

Especially when linked to the insights of the *Strength Finder* instrument, I believe the

engaged congregation research offers another practical tool for the “how to” dimension of my adult faith formation work. My major caution with Gallup’s engagement resources is the expense involved when contracting with them to lead the processes in a congregation. But simply reading the book and then adapting the material can be fruitful.

Both strengths-based and engagement resources include the two elements I have suggested are central to all effective adult faith formation: personal reflection and conversation (at least when using small groups with the strengths resources). Many parishes and congregations have used strengths-based tools and resources to help members identify their gifts and discern ways to share those with the community. In some cases the strengths approach has transformed approaches to stewardship and led to dramatic increases in volunteer leadership and program participation. For our purposes here, the strengths resources provide effective tools for making the work of spiritual discernment real and concrete.

Leisa Anslinger has become a national leader in the use of strengths and engagement resources within the Catholic community. Check out her website, *The Generous Heart* at <http://www.thegenerousheart.com/home>.

4. One-Minute Meditation

Over the last decade I have discovered and refined a simple prayer method that has nourished my own spiritual life and been eagerly embraced and practiced by those with whom I’ve shared it. Grounded in the conviction that our spiritual lives, like all our relationships, unfold and deepen literally one minute at a time, I call the practice “one-minute meditation” and the theological principle behind it “one-minute *metanoia*.” I now incorporate both concepts as foundational elements of my adult faith formation vision and practice.

I initially developed one-minute meditation as a personal prayer practice and

evolved practical techniques for incorporating it into my daily life. A few years ago I proposed to my pastor that we offer it as a personal and communal Lenten practice. The response was so positive that it has become a recurring feature of parish life. I now commonly incorporate one-minute meditation in my workshops and retreats and many parishes have used it with great success.

A couple years ago I presented a 90-minute workshop on the practice at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress. The audio of that presentation, along with a link to a handout, is available on my website at: [http://www.tomzanzig.com/resources/audio/One Minute Meditation](http://www.tomzanzig.com/resources/audio/One_Minute_Meditation).

5. Self-Directed Small Groups

Parker Palmer has long been one of my personal sources of light and hope. I have been particularly influenced by his wonderful book, *A Hidden Wholeness* (Jossey-Bass, 2004). Subtitled “Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World,” Palmer combines profound insights into the nature of personal spirituality with a challenging method (what he calls circles of trust) for small groups to follow in nurturing one another’s spiritual lives. When I first read the book it deeply connected with my own spiritual hungers and led me to initiate a small “circle” with two friends, which continues to nourish and sustain me.

In the last two decades or so, even moderately effective adult faith formation approaches seem to include some version of small groups. Gallup’s research supports that view (see chapter 8 of *Growing an Engaged Congregation*). The *concept* of small groups is clearly on target; they offer a powerful opportunity for nurturing the spiritual companionship identified as one of my core values. But many small group approaches ultimately fail. Why? Because we use (perhaps misuse) the groups as just another venue for delivering our prepackaged content using methods out of touch with the real needs of

those gathered. We haven't changed paradigms, only delivery systems. And good people seeking genuine growth often walk away disappointed.

Both my study and personal experience convince me to include the small group experience in my own vision and practice. But I believe that for the vast majority of congregations, if not for most individuals, such groups have to be self-generated, self-directed, and self-sustained. That is, they cannot require the care and direction of a professional minister—in part, because we simply don't have enough leaders to take on that task and, second, I'm convinced that there can be no "one size fits all" approach to small groups. I am currently developing an approach that is flexible and responsive to the particular needs and interests of *each small group*.

6. Personal and Communal Spiritual Disciplines and Practices

Many older Catholics (I wear the tag proudly) remember a time when their religious identity was virtually defined by personal and communal practices that, for some, became lifelong spiritual disciplines. We could all name our favorite (or, for some, least favorite) personal devotions, family rituals, seasonal celebrations, and so on. In response to a variety of cultural and ecclesial changes and influences, many of those religious identifiers have been diminished or lost altogether—to the relief of some and the consternation of others.

In the last decade or so, however, spiritual disciplines and practices have made a stunning comeback, but in ways that are for the most part more healthy, mature, and more deeply integrated into a balanced understanding of holistic spirituality. Classic books like Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (HarperSanFrancisco), continue to sell, while more recent popular offerings like *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People*

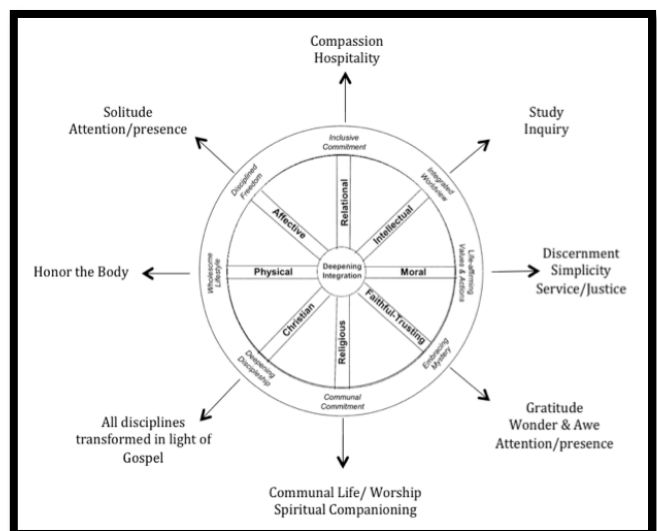
edited by Dorothy Bass (Jossey-Bass Publishers).

A website that is almost overwhelming in the scope of its resources is *Spirituality & Practice: Resources for Spiritual Journeys* (<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com>).

As I use the terms, *disciplines* are universal spiritual capacities, attitudes, "habits of the heart," while *practices* are exercises, routines, and training methods that help us grow, expand, and deepen the disciplines. Practices change and evolve; disciplines grow and deepen.

I encourage faith communities to introduce and integrate spiritual disciplines and practices as a regular and ongoing element of congregational life. I have identified 12 spiritual disciplines: compassion, hospitality, community/companions, gratitude/joy/hope, attention/presence, service/justice, simplicity, discernment, study/inquiry, honor the body, solitude, and wonder/awe. For a description of practices that enhance each discipline go to: [http://www.tomzanig.com/Site/Handouts_files/Spiritual Disciplines %26 Practices.pdf](http://www.tomzanig.com/Site/Handouts_files/Spiritual%20Disciplines%26Practices.pdf).

I have also linked the twelve disciplines to the Spirituality Wheel to show how the disciplines can support growth within each dimension of the spiritual life.



A congregation might introduce, promote, and practice in various settings and through various means one spiritual discipline every few months on a recurring cycle. Over time, some disciplines might emerge as defining characteristics or features of congregational life.

7. Personal Covenant and Annual Examen

In this strategy, engaged members of the congregation are each year invited to create a personal spiritual covenant—i.e. a personal plan for growing spiritually during the coming year. They are asked to make commitments in three areas:

1. a personal spiritual practice (perhaps one-minute meditation)
2. a communal connection (perhaps participation in a “circle”)
3. a way of service (within and/or outside the parish)

The covenant might be connected to small group work, would be confidential (though perhaps developed with a trusted companion or spiritual advisor), and could involve a ritual of some kind (e.g. the presentation of the covenant statement as part of a worship experience).

Further, the covenant could be *initiated* on the anniversary of one’s baptism as a way to recall and recommit to that seminal event. And one might be invited to mark the *conclusion* of the annual covenant with a formal examen—perhaps with the help of a spiritual advisor or companion, on the anniversary of one’s baptism.

8. Web Resources: Current and Future Possibilities

A final ingredient in my adult faith formation “recipe” (final for now, anyway!), is actually a wide-ranging and growing collection of tools

and strategies. The last of my core adult faith formation pastoral principles is the conviction that we have to better use available and emerging technologies to serve the purposes of adult faith formation and, indeed, most other ministries in the church. Many Web-based services related to both the communal and individual dimensions of my AFF vision and practice are already available.

Communally, congregations can use web technologies and services to:

- disseminate information about all of the adult faith formation principles and practices described in this essay
- facilitate communication from and among pastoral leaders and community members
- reach out to disengaged members for the purposes of welcoming and evangelization
- deliver program content
- enhance other parish ministries—learning, worship, service, etc.

Personally or individually, web-based services can help each disciple:

- access reliable sources of spiritual and theological information
- develop personal prayer practices and modes of study
- link with people of similar interests and needs
- assess, plan, and track their personal spiritual growth

So rich are the online possibilities for enhancing spiritual growth, and so rapidly are they expanding, that a parish or congregation would be wise to develop a team whose primary task is to search the web for possibilities, evaluate and discern their usefulness for community members, and then disseminate information about those they deem helpful. Seekers today need trusted guides and “content curators” to help navigate

the web, leaders who can help them separate the spiritual wheat from the chaff.

Turning the Dream into Reality

Each congregation will mix-'n-match the above strategies in unique ways. Here is just one way a congregation might implement my model of adult faith formation. As presented, the approach suggests *sequential* steps, but many strategies can overlap, shortening the plan.

Year 1

Prepare the Community

1. Raise awareness of the need for ongoing renewal of the parish, its mission, life, and practices.
2. Create a sense of urgency but also excitement and hope. One tactic: the pastor's call to arms—publicly naming and embracing new challenges.
3. Consider a sabbatical year focused on the spiritual life of the parish; meet with leaders, committees, etc. to assess and plan how that might play out.
4. Emphasize that the primary focus during the sabbatical is the conscientious and intentional celebration of the liturgy and sacraments.
5. Introduce one-minute meditation as a personal and communal practice.

Year 2

Appreciative Inquiry Process

1. Remember: the process *is* the “program”! AI doesn't just *result* in change; the process itself is transformative.
2. Pay close attention to your AI “affirmative topic choice,” clearly defining your focus. (Here I presume a focus on nurturing the spiritual life of adults and better equipping them to assume personal responsibility for it.)

3. Consider linking the AI process to the liturgical year, e.g., starting in Advent and scheduling a closing AI summit during Lent.
4. Commit to establishing an “appreciative culture” within the parish.
5. Evaluate your use of the web for communication and leadership purposes.
6. Consider introducing spiritual disciplines and practices on a thoughtful schedule, e.g., focus on a new one every three months through bulletin announcements and essays, pulpit references, integration into parish meetings and events, personal and small group commitments, etc. On that schedule, all twelve disciplines would be treated every three years.

Year 3

Introduce Foundational Elements of the Spiritual Discernment Model

(The AI process, when used with integrity, should dictate next steps. But for the purposes of this example, I suggest strategies proposed in my model.)

1. Identify “engaged” members who are willing to consciously enter into the next phase—a serious commitment to learn and employ the tools and practices of personal spiritual discernment.
2. Offer resources, retreats and workshops on my Spiritual Growth Cycle, Spirituality Wheel, and Discernment Tool.
3. Introduce, promote and initiate the strategies of (1) spiritual companions and (2) self-organized and self-directed small groups.
4. Invite adults to try the annual examen as a helpful spiritual practice.
5. Consider training select leaders as spiritual companions.
6. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Year 4

Offer Strengths-Finder Inventory and Related Strategies

1. Introduce and promote the Strengths concept and resources to the entire parish as a way to lift up and celebrate the gift of each member.
2. Invite engaged (and possibly trained) members (see Year 3) to assume particular leadership roles in the parish-wide implementation of Strengths.
3. Consider linking Strengths to other small group opportunities, e.g., the small groups initiated in year 3 might consider using Strengths Finder (or *Living Your Strengths*) for exploring personal gifts and calls to service.
4. Invite the pastoral team and other leaders to use *Strengths-Based Leadership* by Thomas Rath and Barry Conchie (New York: Gallup Press, 2008).
5. Expand and deepen your use of technology, especially web-based services and resources related to spirituality.
6. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Year 5

Conduct Gallup's "Engagement" Assessment Process and Follow-Up

1. It may seem logical to employ this strategy earlier in the plan, allowing congregations to then use engagement concepts and tools to better monitor the effectiveness of all the other strategies. However, the formal and full-blown engagement process involves paying Gallup to conduct and guide the research. Many may find that prohibitive. Delaying the use of this strategy allows interested parishes time to raise the financial resources required.
2. A second reason for delaying use of the engagement resources is to expand the base of already engaged and, perhaps, trained leaders equipped to respond to and build upon what is learned through the assessment process.

3. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.
4. Evaluate whether to repeat AI process, perhaps in modified form.
5. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Subsequent Years:

Expand and Go Deeper

None of the strategies proposed in this plan are expected to be single use, "one and done" strategies. The goal is to create an *appreciative, spiritual transformation culture* reflecting the characteristics summarized in my proposed covenant. Building on the cyclic image of my Spiritual Growth Cycle, imagine this process as a spiral in which all these strategies combine to lead the parish, as well as its individual members, deeper and deeper into the ongoing process of transformation.

Closing Comments

I have proposed that the adult faith formation process outlined here might unfold slowly over a three- to five-year period and then be repeated as needed. For example, one might plan on repeating the Appreciative Inquiry "town hall meeting" every three years or so as a way to surface the wisdom of new members (or the new wisdom of old members!) and identify changing circumstances that might prompt new pastoral responses.

Some elements of the process would hopefully become routine and ongoing dimensions of parish life. For example, a congregation might invite every new member to use the online Strength Finder inventory to identify their talents before committing to any particular involvement in the parish. The immediate and concrete message to the new member would be, "We know you bring unique gifts to this community. We want you to name those talents first for your own growth and happiness. Then, as the Spirit moves you, we invite you to share them with the rest of us." How do you think a new

member would respond to such affirmation and hospitality?

Or, perhaps, a congregation will choose to make the One-Minute Meditation a common practice for all official parish functions—meetings, religious education classes, special events, and so on.

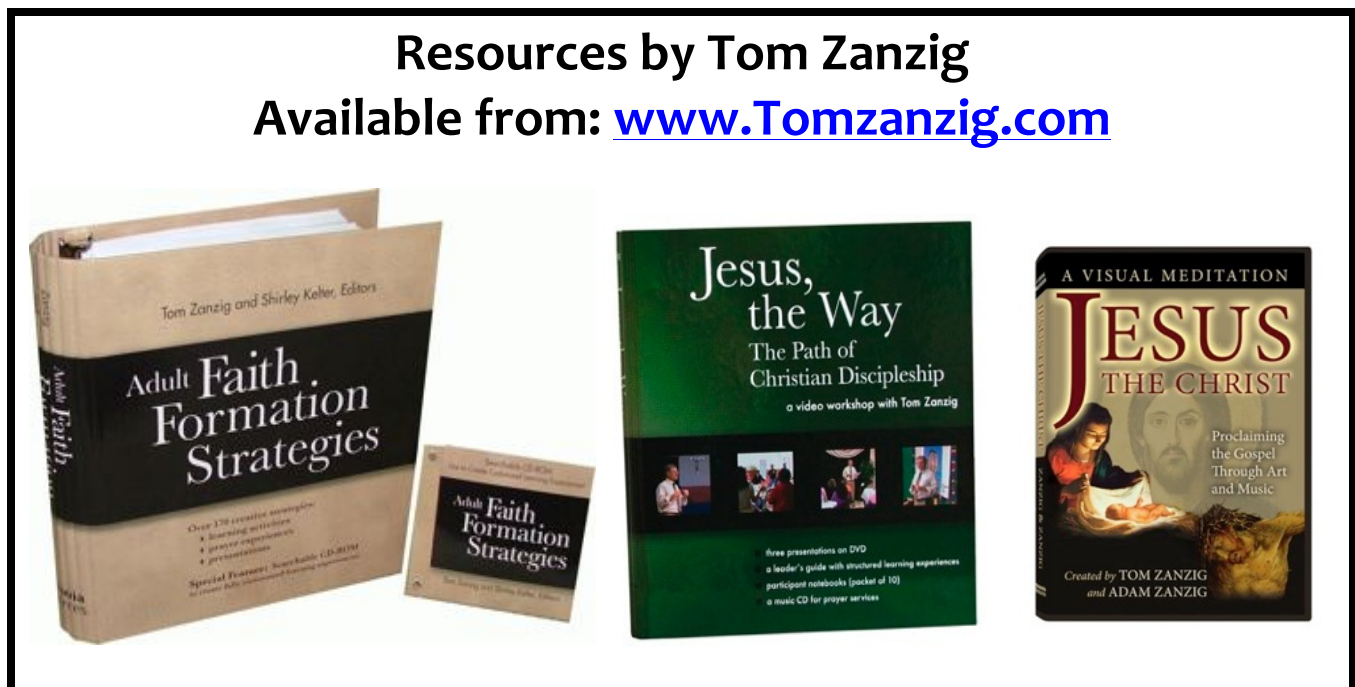
Finally, I do not mean to suggest that adult faith formation can be accomplished without any formal, structured programs. In fact, a desire for and openness to various kinds of programming might well emerge *from* the process. But programs will be

selected and then retained only if they truly serve *these* adults in *this* place and time. Programs will come and go, and we won't expect them to accomplish more than they can. The people, not the programs, are sacred.

Clearly my adult faith formation vision and practice is a work in progress. I have much to learn, test out, and critically evaluate. But I'm convinced that I'm onto something valuable. Thanks for joining me in the adventure!

Resources by Tom Zanzig

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JUNE 17 – AUGUST 2 SUMMER ONLINE COURSE
BARBARA ANNE RADTKE – Christology in Pastoral Perspective

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THOMAS GROOME – Sharing Faith and the New Evangelization
DANIEL HARRINGTON, S.J. – Introduction to the New Testament
REV. RICHARD LENNAN – Theology for Mission and Ministry: 50 Years After Vatican II
HOSFFMAN OSPINO – Ministry in a Culturally Diverse Church: Perspectives
NANCY PINEDA-MADRID – Theological Foundations in Practical Perspective
PHILIP SHELDRAKE – Spirituality and the Christian Life

JULY 1– JULY 19 2:30-5:30 p.m.
JANE REGAN – Adult Believers in a Postmodern Context for the New Evangelization (**3 credits**)

JULY 8 – JULY 19 Session Two 8:45-11:45 a.m.
CORRINE CARVALHO – Introduction to the Old Testament
REV. MICHAEL HIMES – The Church in the World
JOHN MCDARGH – Spirituality and Sexuality
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Adult Spiritual Formation: Nurturing Adults in Christ and for Others

Jim Merhaut

I recently sat in a church pew with my wife and youngest daughter (age 14) and listened to a sermon about heaven. The preacher was reflecting upon the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. He said that we believe our souls will go to heaven when we die and our bodies will decompose in our graves until the end of time when God will raise our bodies and reunite them with our souls in heaven. He defended this position with citations from Scripture and with references to traditional Christian doctrines. He was driving to one key point: there is a physical dimension to heaven. In fact, he closed his sermon with that statement: “And in conclusion, heaven has a physical dimension.”

I sat there wondering the same things that I often wonder after sermons and religious education sessions: What does this have to do with my life today? How will this knowledge help me love my wife better, raise my daughter with greater wisdom, perform my job with greater integrity, treat my neighbor with kindness, etc.? What is the point of the doctrine of bodily resurrection, or of any doctrine for that matter, in everyday life? How do I apply my beliefs in the daily circumstances of my life? These are the questions of spirituality.

Let’s be clear. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body is critically important for Christians to believe in and to understand. But belief and understanding imply far more than rote knowledge. Rote knowledge is one piece of a broader picture of Christian faith formation, a picture that includes and is set in the context of spirituality. Expressing faith with words and concepts is only part of the spirituality equation. Lived experience is the other part. Maria Harris based her critique of James Fowler’s celebrated *Stages of Faith* on the fact that all of Fowler’s data was gathered through interviews. A fuller picture of faith maturity would require observation in real-life settings (see Regan, 57). Spiritual maturity is much more than what we

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say; it is also what we do that defines who we are in relation to God and others.

Spirituality experts often distinguish between information and formation. Churches need to pass on doctrinal information, but it rings hollow if the information piece is not offered in the context of the formation piece. Formation refers to the complete spectrum of the spiritual maturation process. Information is at the service of our broader formational process. Knowledge (information) helps us make sense of experience and give us cognitive structural parameters out of which we can conceptualize and speak about meaningful living (formation). Spirituality is concerned both with information and formation, words and actions if you will, but information is one small piece of the broader picture of spiritual formation. The preacher in the opening story offered information without speaking a word about spiritual formation. This is a common oversight in Christian faith formation.

In this essay, we will explore the meaning of spirituality, especially for adults; and then we will discuss strategies for churches to integrate their faith formation programs within the broader context of spiritual formation.

Defining Christian Spirituality

Definitions for Christian spirituality have been abundant over the past fifty years. Here are several suggested definitions by notable spiritual writers from various traditions.

Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation as, "...a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others." (Mulholland, 15) Selfless, other-oriented perspectives and behaviors are hallmarks of Christian spirituality. We learn to live this way by studying the words and actions of Jesus and incorporating them into our daily lives.

Christian spirituality is outward thinking. Jonathan Morrow, an evangelical pastor, critiques the evangelical tradition for being too inward focused. He writes:

Christianity is not just privately true, requiring our attention for only two hours on a Sunday morning; it is public and should affect the totality of life (i.e., a Christian worldview). Unfortunately, evangelicals have withdrawn from ethical, social, political, educational, and cultural issues and institutions. As evangelicals, we need to enter into dialogue in the public square and become part of the solution (not just heralds of the many problems).... The words of Francis Schaeffer ring as true today as the day they were penned: "True spirituality—the Christian life—flows on into the total culture. (Pettit, 49)

Christian spirituality calls us to take the faith we celebrate on Sunday and live from it in our public lives. Christianity is more nomadic than sedentary. A church turned in on itself risks compromising its Christian identity.

Richard Foster defines spirituality as the "with-God life." Foster devotes the third chapter of his book, *Life with God*, to outlining the biblical foundation for the belief that God is always with us. Spiritually mature adults respond to God's constant presence by consenting to being with God in each moment of daily life. Foster concludes the chapter, "God is with you; will you choose to be with God?" The mature adult Christian sees God in all things and in all events and participates with God's presence in all things and events.

Michael Downey is the editor of the award-winning *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. He has defined Christian spirituality as

... the whole of the Christian's life as this is oriented to self-transcending knowledge, freedom, and love in light of

the ultimate values and highest ideals perceived and pursued in the mystery of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in the church, the community of disciples. That is to say, spirituality is concerned with everything that constitutes Christian experience, specifically the perception and pursuit of the highest ideal or goal of Christian life, e.g., an ever more intense union with God disclosed in Christ through life in the Spirit.

Downey affirms what has been revealed in the earlier definitions: there is nothing that falls outside of the realm of a person's spiritual journey. Downey also emphasizes the critically important role of the Christian community in a person's spiritual formation. Christians cannot become spiritually mature apart from engagement in community.

A number of key points emerge from these definitions. We will explore four essential dimensions of Christian spirituality:

1. Christian spirituality is a movement from selfishness to love.
2. Christian spirituality connects us with God (The Trinity) in a communal setting.
3. Christian spirituality is nurtured through Scripture and church tradition.
4. Christian spirituality informs and forms every part of our lives.

From Selfishness to Love

Adults mature in their spirituality by moving from selfishness to love in every aspect of their lives. The independence that is sought after and celebrated in adolescence is found wanting as one grows into the awareness that healthy human functioning requires active participation in a complex network of give-and-take interdependent relationships. Adults embrace accountability over independence as a key component of

spiritual maturity. Several examples will illustrate this point:

- ***Married Adults:*** Married persons become more spiritually mature when they spurn independent behavior in their spousal relationships in favor of interdependent behavior. Selfish demands give way to negotiated agreements. No married person can mature spiritually while thinking and acting in ways that exclude the concerns of his or her spouse. As one body, a married couple is comprised of two persons who are as concerned about the other as they are for self. Selfishness has no place in marriage.
- ***Single Adults:*** Single persons become spiritually mature by engaging a broad range of relationships, from friends to co-workers to family members, with a spirit of generosity and concern for building up unity in the communities in which they live. Single persons are not called to single life because they desire to be unaccountable to others. Accountability calls one to responsible communal living and is only possible when a person transcends self-centered behavior in favor of mutuality. Selfishness, as with married persons, has no place in single living.
- ***Working Adults:*** Adults in the workplace become spiritually mature by choosing careers for which they are gifted and by sharing their gifts with a sense of justice and integrity. Spiritually mature workers pursue careers not from a self-centered motivation for wealth, but more so from a motivation to share one's gifts with the world. If wealth results from work, the spiritually mature individual uses wealth for the benefit of the community because of the Christian conviction that all gifts come from God

and are meant to be shared among all of God's creatures. Spiritually aware workers also have a strong sense that they represent the companies for which they work, and they are called to live in virtuous ways which bring honor to those companies. There is no room for selfishness in the workplace. Spiritually mature adults grow in love by sharing their God-given gifts with others and by graciously receiving and celebrating the gifts of others.

- *Homemaking:* Whether single or married, all adults are called to make a home for themselves, a place to express their deepest values and beliefs that are shared in a spirit of hospitality with all who are welcomed across the threshold. A home is more than a place to protect one from the elements. A home is more than a refuge from the world. The Christian home is a place for prayer, a place for extraordinary acts of love, and a place for unselfish sharing with a wide variety of people.

A defining mark of mature adult spirituality is a distinctly Christian sense of self. Spiritually mature adults find the center of themselves mysteriously outside of themselves, centered in the relationships they share with God and others. Adult spirituality is marked by a profound concern for the other that leads one to see the self in an entirely new way. I find myself, my truest self, by loving someone else. I put the concerns of others on the same level as my concerns for myself, and in so doing, I am stretched to new and enormously rewarding perspectives. In some remarkable circumstances, I will even put the needs of others above my own. Spouses and parents do this on a regular basis, and martyrs are shining examples of this type of mature self-giving. It is in the quest for the mystery of love in a relationship with another person or persons that an adult Christian finds joy and peace.

Christian adults, out of genuine concern for others, are also called to challenge unjust actions and structures in our communities. Once again, the measuring stick of love before selfishness is consistent and simple. Injustices are expressions of selfishness; someone or some organization is getting more than is due at the expense of another's needs. We can identify injustices by the way in which they obstruct harmony in human relationships. Contained within the movement from selfishness to love is the non-judgmental compulsion to invite others to the same kind of unselfish living.

Connecting to God through Scripture and Tradition

The second and third parts of our definition of spirituality are concerned with the faith community and are especially relevant for faith formation directors. ***Adult spirituality is formed by and expressed in a faith community.*** The faith community has the privilege and the responsibility to pass on the gifts of Scripture and a faith tradition in an attractive, compelling, organized, and empowering way so that people can access the information they need to live their lives rooted in a Christian perspective.

Spiritually mature adults take with them the grace experience in Christian community and use it to transform the world. One pastor sent a clear message to his parishioners when he changed all the exit signs in the church's worship space to enter signs, inviting parishioners to enter the world with renewed faith and energy to fulfill the mission of the church, which is to transform the world into a place ruled by love. The point of Sunday worship is to change the world between the Sundays of the year. A traditional Irish poem reveals the tragic nature of those who fail to capture the essence of the connection between religion and spirituality:

Paddy Murphy went to Mass;
Never missed a Sunday.
But Paddy Murphy went to hell
For what he did on Monday.

Some of us miss the vital belief that faith and daily life are intimately intertwined. We mistakenly think that the work of God is completed inside church walls, and that the only people who do spiritual things of any significance are ministers, priests, and other religious professionals. Mother Theresa of Calcutta didn't agree. She was once asked, "How do you feel when people say of you that you are a living saint?" She wisely and simply replied: "Isn't everyone supposed to be a saint?"

Our participation in Sunday worship and other faith formation experiences at church help us to focus our relationship with God. The purpose of that focusing time is to put our worship and learning into action in whatever we find ourselves doing the other six days of the week. Sunday worship and Christian faith formation reach their fulfillment in faith-filled daily living, which gives shape to our beliefs and is the expression of mature spirituality.

It's About Everything

There is nothing that we think, feel, say, or do that falls outside of the realm of spirituality. The simple reason for this is that God is everywhere. All of creation and every lived experience are doorways to the sacred. ***Spiritual maturity is the process of waking up to the divine presence in everyone and everything.***

Each person finds his or her unique spirituality by living with the eyes of faith wide open within the particular circumstances and routines of daily life. If you are at work, you are called to live workplace spirituality and allow your faith to guide your words and actions. If you are interacting with your spouse, you are called to live the spirituality of marriage and to express your

faith in God through the love you give to and receive from your spouse. If you are a farmer, you are called to live eco spirituality and to do your work with a reverent respect for the integrity of creation. If you are a student, academic spirituality calls you to intellectual curiosity and to be strong in the face of temptations such as plagiarism and cheating.

Spirituality is the way we allow our faith in God and our communal worship on Sunday to guide our every activity and interaction. Whatever you find yourself doing each day, you are being called within that activity to experience the power of God through the expression of your faith and worship. Your response to that call is what opens the door for God to transform the world into the likeness of the kingdom of God through your spiritual life.

Characteristics of Adult Christian Spirituality

What does Christian spirituality look like? The Gospel of Matthew includes a fascinating teaching from the Lord about the end of the world that provides a key insight in the characteristics of spiritual maturity. Jesus compared the last day to the times of Moses before the flood. Note the ordinary nature of the activities he highlights: eating, drinking, marrying, and working.

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one

will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:36-42, NRSV)

One of the most thought-provoking pieces of this passage is that Jesus describes the activity of those “taken” and those “left” in exactly the same way. The two men in the field are doing the same thing; one is taken and one is left. The two women grinding meal are doing exactly the same thing; one is taken and one is left.

If Jesus’ primary concern for humanity was of a religious nature, then he would have described the saved or “taken” individuals in religious terms. The man or woman who was taken would have been praying or offering incense or performing a religious sacrifice while the ones who were left would have been swept up with the concerns of mundane daily living: working in the field and grinding meal. It is significant that the saved are doing their daily work.

The difference between the “taken” and the “left” is not a difference of religious participation; it is a difference of integration. We have to assume that one of the men in the field works his field with a heart filled with love for God and love for neighbor while the other does not. His religious experiences have been integrated into his daily work. The same is true for the women. We have to assume that one of the women grinding meal does so with a heart filled with love for God and love for neighbor while the other does not.

Jane Regan notes that outward behavior is not always a good indicator of inner spiritual disposition: “Basically, it is almost impossible to discern the dominant operative stage of another person; outward expression is not helpful in explicating another person’s faith stage. Two people may be engaged in similar activities... for very different reasons, and with significantly different understandings of authority and the role of the community.”

Another key point of this chapter in Matthew’s gospel is the unpredictable timing of the last days. The chapter opens with the

disciples asking about when the end will come. Jesus closed the passage cited above with the statement that the timing of the end will not be revealed; therefore, staying awake and alert is the only viable option for the spiritually mature. So if I am working in the field, I work from a disposition of faith in God. If I am grinding meal, I do my work from a disposition of faith in God. I stay awake and alert by living each moment of my life as an expression of faith. My religion finds its fulfillment in spiritual living.

What does it look like to live as a spiritually mature adult? Let’s focus on two characteristics—integrity and vigilance. *Integrity* focus on aligning beliefs and actions, words and deeds, is the mark of integrity. *Vigilance* is recognizing that every second is a graced opportunity.

Integrity

Preaching and teaching will have spiritual punch if they offer practical suggestions for how the members of the congregation might take the message and apply it to the various circumstances of daily living. Helping people to align their beliefs and actions requires intimate knowledge of what daily life in the community looks like. What are the children experiencing a school? What are the working conditions of bosses and employees in businesses in the community? What are the top issues facing families in their homes in this particular community? Preachers and teachers who tirelessly search for answers to these questions will teach with relevance. They will empower the adults in their communities to live with spiritual integrity. People will not only know what they believe, they will know how to believe it, and how to express it on Monday morning and beyond.

Vigilance

There is a certain urgency expressed in the gospels. While there are a number of reasons for this urgency, it is clear that Jesus calls his

followers to live their faith now—to do the right thing right now. Today is the day; leave tomorrow for tomorrow. The kingdom of God is breaking into our lives ceaselessly.

Spiritually mature adults are vigilant about sensing God's presence and responding to it.

Spiritually mature Christian adults: 1) put the needs of others on an equal or greater level than their own; 2) know what they believe; 3) know that relationships are the source of life's greatest joys and value relationships, particularly intimate relationships, above all other pursuits; and 4) know that every moment is a "with-God" moment.

Several other characteristics of spiritually mature Christian adults include: appreciating the ordinary rather than chasing the spectacular, focusing on relationships, prioritizing concern for others over self-preservation, forgiving others, participating in community, being aware of transcendence, and standing in awe of mystery.

Faith Formation Strategies to Nurture Spiritual Maturity

What can you do to become a congregation that nurtures people to spiritual maturity?

1. Shift your Perspective from Teaching to Forming

While one could certainly argue that good teaching is spiritually formative, we will treat teaching and formation as distinct for the sake of emphasis. The purpose of faith formation is to make disciples. Imparting doctrinal knowledge, while essential and important, is never enough for discipleship. In fact, it is secondary. The primary movement of disciple-making is introducing people to how God is calling them to a love relationship every moment of every day. This can be

accomplished in a variety of ways including the following.

- a focus on the life of Jesus as core content
- inspirational story-telling
- an awareness of relationship best practices: in marriage, in extended family, in friendship, in the workplace, in neighborhoods, and in the wider community
- vibrant and engaging worship with full use of symbols
- retreat experiences
- art and drama
- field trips

The doctrinal content of Christianity makes spiritual sense only when it is taught through the dynamic experiences of real life.

2. Shift Focus to What Happens Outside the Church Walls

Balance your concern with "on-campus" programs and worship with equal concern for what is happening in the lives of people when they are not on church property. It's my experience that people act differently when they are in a church. We don't always see the true colors of our parishioners. I knew an elderly woman, Judy, for many years, but we only saw each other at church. She was always so kind and proper. One evening, I ran into her at a rock concert at an outdoor amphitheater. As we were talking she was admiring the tattoos on one of the musicians. She said that she and her late husband used to ride motorcycles recreationally. I was surprised to discover that she liked to wear leather and apply temporary tattoos to her exposed skin whenever she rode a motorcycle. She leaned in close to me and whispered in my ear with a playful grin, "I'm a bikin' bitch!"

I tried to look at her as though she just told me, "It is a pleasant day in the park," but I was absolutely floored by what she said and by the context of the statement. I was seeing

an entirely new side of Judy. Back at church the next Sunday, she was the same old kind and proper grandma Judy I had always known. The point is that if I had known this about Judy when I was participating in faith formation programs with her, I would have certainly changed my stories and illustrations in order to capture her imagination. I would have never connected biker spirituality with Judy. Now I know, and I will minister to her differently because of the knowledge.

The different styles of Jesus and Paul emphasize this point. Jesus told stories about sheep, Paul did not. Why? Jesus was speaking to rural people. Paul's ministry was focused in urban centers. They knew the daily routines of their audiences, and they adjusted their approach to faith formation accordingly.

Do you know your congregation? I mean, do you really know your congregation? If you are going to put your finger on the spiritual pulse of your church, you have to know intimately how people live their lives outside of church. Consider spending time participating in community events outside of the church; visiting schools, businesses, hospitals, nursing homes, etc. to see how people are functioning on a day-to-day basis; attending public hearings on local issues.

3. Examples, Examples, Examples

Never teach a doctrine without offering examples for how the doctrine can be expressed in the lives of the learners. The examples you offer will be determined by the experiences of your community. If you are teaching in a wealthy suburban community, then your examples need to be rooted in the experiences of living in a wealthy suburban community.

4. Witness

Share yourself if you want your hearers to be inspired to share themselves with each other. Connect with your audience by showing how

you have personally invested in the content of what you are teaching. Why does Jesus make a difference in your life? Always answer that question when you teach.

5. Invite Sharing

The people in your church will inspire each other if given the chance. Mine the riches of your community by allowing time for learners to become the teachers. Let them tell each other how they live their faith each day. Let them imagine and brainstorm ways to apply the content of a learning session.

6. Hold People Accountable

The final word on spiritual maturity is accountability. We are our brother's and sister's keepers. We need to help each other along the journey. An isolated Christian is a Christian heading to the exit door. The close of every program or activity should include an opportunity for participants to commit to some kind of action plan that is focused on the near future. The beginning of every program or activity should include an opportunity for people to share about how their action plan from the previous session worked or didn't work. Be ready to offer suggestions for how to get back on track for those who failed to implement their action plans.

Conclusion

Spiritual maturity happens in real life, but churches have a significant role to play in the process. Churches leaders need to see themselves in the servant role. Leaders serve the process of spiritual formation by believing that the core formation happens when people are outside a structured program or experience. Once we believe this, we can design programs and activities that are engaging and empowering. Faith formation programs designed to nurture spiritual

maturity help adults live what they believe in every circumstance of daily life.

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A View from the Community: What Are We Learning about Adult Faith Formation

Janet Schaeffler, OP

Take a moment to reflect on the following quotes from people throughout the ages. Consider what they are saying about who we are, where we are today, and the challenge and wonder of adult faith formation in our churches.

In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.
(Eric Hoffer)

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.
(Benjamin Franklin)

Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.
(William Butler Yeats)

I learned most not from those who taught me but from those who talked with me.
(St. Augustine)

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Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.
(Pope Paul VI)

Sometimes when you don't know the answer to a question that keeps playing over and over again in your mind, it's because you're messing with the wrong question.
(Anonymous)

*Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake for pity's sake?*
(Christopher Frye)

The seven last words of a dying organization: we never did it that way before.
(Anonymous)

We need a new apologetic, geared to the needs of today, which keeps in mind that our task is not to win arguments but to win souls... Such an apologetic will need to breathe a spirit of humanity, that humility and compassion which understand the anxieties and questions of people.
(Pope John Paul II)

Does this seem like a list of unconnected or disjointed quotes from various people throughout the ages? As I reflect on them, often keep them before me, they're not. In various ways they say significant things about who we are, where we are today, and the challenge and wonder of adult faith formation in our churches. They remind us of our successes and triumphs; they prompt us forward to work for and live "for the more."

As we embark on this short overview and reflection on adult faith formation today, that is what we will do here: 1) reflect on several

signs of growth, best practices, in our ministry of adult faith formation over the last several years; 2) explore several continuing challenges.

(You might use these quotes—yourself and with your adult faith formation teams—to ask: What does this call us to in our ministry within our adult-centered communities?)

Signs of Growth in Adult Faith Formation

Let us, first then, explore some signs of growth in our understanding and practice of adult faith formation.

Best Practice 1. Leadership

Adult faith formation doesn't just happen. Wherever there is a thriving community, committed to ongoing growth in the faith journey, there is dedicated—and designated—and formed leadership.

For years, many practitioners have advocated for the profession of adult faith formation ministry.

Giving focus to adults through provision of a specialist can mean more significant ministry to all adults and increased quality of educational efforts with them. . . . The Director of Adult Religious Education is more than a promoter of denominational programs for adults or an 'activities director' for adults. . . . The Director of Adult Religious Education must be an educator in the truest sense, establishing philosophy, cooperatively setting program objectives, assessing needs, and facilitating adult learning through the widest possible array of learning avenues." (Wharton)

While adult faith formation is the responsibility of the entire congregation, it nonetheless needs to be the specific

responsibility of one staff member (and some church members serving on teams) to lead this ministry.

The best practices I discovered in two studies of adult faith formation usually were from churches in which there was a dedicated staff person and a team. One comment from a church member about the importance of a staff person: “I thought we were doing a great deal to provide resources and opportunities for adult faith growth. It has just multiplied a thousand-fold since we have added a staff person who is dedicated to adult faith formation—in all its possibilities.”

This key staff person needs the credentials and the time to devote to the ministry of adult faith formation. It’s not just about planning a program here or there (bringing in three speakers a year!). Adult faith formation is the way a congregation lives. This individual will advocate for the primacy of adult faith formation, helping everyone to view all dimensions of parish life through the lens of adult faith formation. This takes time and energy.

If the designated leader is the parish director of religious education or another staff person, adjustments may be needed in job descriptions so as not to shortchange the amount and quality of time and energy they can devote to adult faith formation. Otherwise their many responsibilities may prevent them from devoting sufficient time to this essential priority. (USCCB #136)

Best Practice 2. Needs Assessment

One of the principles of adult learning reminds us: Adults learn best when they have input into the what, why, and how they will learn. They are motivated to participate when they have been part of the planning.

One of the ways to be attentive to this is to do continual needs assessment, using various methods. The most successful best practices (in these two studies) are ones in

which the needs of the people determined what was planned/offered.

A few of the ways to do a needs assessment include:

1. evaluations completed at the conclusion of adult faith formation events
2. reflection on the demographics of your parish/congregation through an up-to-date census, as well as the statistics available from the local area (city, county, region, etc.)
3. self-assessment inventories
4. focus groups and think tanks
5. interviews
6. surveys, especially ones done electronically using SurveyMonkey or other online survey services
7. leaders observing church members: What is being talked about? What are the everyday concerns of the people?
8. paying attention to the reports church council and committee meetings: What are they spending their time on? What doesn’t get time?

Leon McKenzie and R. Michael Harton, in *The Religious Education of Adults* remind us what congregations demonstrating best practices have experienced.

... interests and needs are not the same, though they are frequently confused by religious educators. An interest is an expression of some degree of desire, while need connotes a deficit. Religious educators often make the mistake of assuming that because adults express an interest in a topic, they will participate in a program addressing that topic. . . . Where genuine needs are concerned, the religious educator may confuse ascribed needs and perceived needs. Unfortunately, religious educators often observe adults or examine literature describing the life situation of a group of adults. . . . then they ascribe needs to the adults,

proceeding to plan programs to address those ascribed needs. However, if adults do not perceive that these needs are real, they will not be motivated to participate. Ascribed needs may be the starting point in the assessment process, but they are never sufficient basis for program planning.

Therefore, planning goes beyond the various means of needs assessment. According to McKenzie and Harton, “Prospective participants should be brought into the decision-making process regarding the total educational program. Adults should be invited to help the religious educator implement and administer the educational program. Adults should be invited not only to provide evaluations of the educational program but should also be involved, as is feasible, in the planning of program evaluation.”

Best Practice 3. An Environment of Welcome and Hospitality

More and more books, articles, websites and blogs are discussing the importance of and providing suggestions for congregations to nurture an atmosphere of belonging for all.

Research has shown that people will engage in the life of the parish (e.g. respond to ministerial calls, participate in adult faith formation) because of the atmosphere and environment of the church. One of the key features of this environment is being welcomed—a feeling of belonging.

In most cases, belief does not lead to belonging, but rather, belonging leads to belief, according to research by the Gallup Organization (see *Growing an Engaged Church* by Albert J. Winseman).

Hospitality is a key ingredient of adult faith formation, but the atmosphere of the parish, its theology of welcome, precedes adult faith formation. Without a welcoming, hospitable environment, very few members—

and visitors—will be interested in or motivated for adult faith formation.

Best Practice 4: Adult Ways of Learning

It is obvious today, especially where best practices are happening, that ministers and committees understand and appreciate that adults learn differently than children.

We understand andragogy. Originally used by Alexander Kapp (a German educator) in 1833, andragogy was developed into a theory of adult education by the American educator Malcolm Knowles. Knowles asserted that andragogy (Greek: “man-leading”) should be distinguished from the more commonly used pedagogy (Greek: “child-leading”) when working with adult education.

Knowles’ theory can be stated with six assumptions related to motivation of adult learning:

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before learning it.
2. The self-concept of adult is heavily dependent upon a move toward self-direction.
3. Prior experiences of the learner provide a rich resource for learning.
4. Adults typically become ready to learn when they experience a need to cope with a life situation or perform a task.
5. Adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered; education is a process of developing increased competency levels to achieve their full potential.
6. The motivation for the adult learner is internal rather than external.

These assumptions have led to much reflection and best practices regarding the principles of adult learning.

Best Practice 5: Involvement & Participation

One of the significant signs of growth in adult faith formation—as seen in the best practices studies—is the tendency to “ban the lecture” as a means of adult faith formation. Even though many “programs” still revolve around guest speakers, workshops, and courses, there is a growing realization that adults learn best when they are in conversation with other adults about things that matter. Significant time for conversation and exploration, as well as varied activities and all types of interaction, is the centerpiece of adult faith formation in thriving communities.

Best Practice 6: Responding to the Needs of Communities of Like Interest

Nearly a century ago Henry Ford invented the famous assembly line that is credited with putting Detroit, and the world, in the “mass production” business. When he introduced the Model T, the marketing message was essentially, “You can have any color you want as long as it is black.”

Donald Tapscott, the author of several books on today’s digital world, uses a different term to describe what drives business today: “mass customization.” In effect, “you can have whatever you want customized to your wishes.”

What does this mean for adult faith formation? We can no longer approach adult faith formation with a “one-size-fits-all” mentality. “. . . adults will be interested in (and need) different aspects of the religious according to their personal faith development and expression. An approach of ‘corned beef and hash for everyone’ (which is tantamount to ‘We don’t care what you need, this is what you get because this is what we’ve got’) and programs based simply on what the religious

educator or pastor wants to teach are too capricious.” (McKenzie and Harton)

All we have to do is look at our congregations and we easily realize the diversity and, therefore the reality, that different groups need different things. For example, parents of young children need something different than empty nesters; people who are new in the faith need something different than those who have been practicing the faith for years.

Certainly, there are times when “mixed groups” are important—we learn from the wisdom and experiences of each other. Yet, many congregations tell us that they have better responses to offerings when the offerings are for specific groups—for communities of like interest. Scripture study programs for men at times convenient for their work schedules seem to attract more men than a generic Scripture program. A program exploring various forms of prayer can be tailored to couples, to new parents, to baby boomers, to those who are grieving, et al. Specific groups can be attracted to offerings targeted to them directly, such as: “Effective Grandparenting,” “Relating Effectively to your Adult Children,” “Balancing Love, Work and Life,” “Juggling the Rhythms of Family,” “Planning to Age Gracefully (and Have Fun Doing It),” and so many more.

Seth Godin, a prolific author and marketing expert, could be talking to adult faith formation directors and congregational leaders when he says, “A product for everyone rarely reaches anyone.”

Let’s move on now to some of the challenges we are facing in adult faith formation.

Challenges in Adult Faith Formation

Challenge 1. An Integrated Approach to Planning

Even though there are meaningful things happening in adult faith formation, how are they planned? In some congregations, one or two people think of an idea for an adult faith formation program, launch the program, and eight or ten people show up. Three months later, the same one or two people think of another idea, launch the program, and the same eight to twelve people come. And then people wonder why “it’s not working.”

In some instances, congregations can use this “flashbulb approach” to planning adult faith formation. Someone has an idea; a 4-week Scripture series is planned for next month. In a few months, someone (or the same person) has another idea; a three week series on prayer is scheduled, beginning in two weeks.

In general, adult faith formation has to be systematically planned. It can’t be sporadic. It can’t belong to just a few people. It needs to be the work of the congregation. It needs strategic planning with a comprehensive, integrated plan—a vision, goals, and specific programs and processes designed to fit together.

It is a both/and proposition. This is a fast-changing world. We need to be able to adapt to changing conditions and needs while not losing the focus or vision or our long-range plans. “Adaptive planning,” “tweaking” our integrated long-range plan is frequently a necessary step with today’s fast-paced, ever-changing world, if we are going to be open and ready to meet the needs that arise and surprise us. Our long-range plan of three or five years—necessary as it is—can’t be set in stone; conditions change.

Some churches have commented in the best practices study on this reality. One

congregation reported, *Our most successful programs were in response to what was happening in ‘popular, everyday’ culture – the needs of the people. Another said, What people needed were responses/help to what was happening in their lives, our nation’s life, our church’s life which we didn’t know was going to happen when we set our long range plan.*

Some possible components of a parish pastoral plan for adult faith formation:

- ✓ Church mission statement
- ✓ Mission statement for faith formation
- ✓ Vision statement for adult faith formation
- ✓ The leadership model
- ✓ 3-5 year goals for adult faith formation
- ✓ Objectives and strategies
- ✓ Implementation process: budget, marketing/publicity, facilities, time line, and schedule
- ✓ Methods of evaluation: individual programs, annual evaluation of plan, and staff, team, and facilitator evaluations

Several fundamental reminders about planning for adult faith formation can be gleaned from today’s best practices:

- Planning is never ending! The congregation is always changing. Even though the plan may be “set” for three-to-five years, it always needs to be evaluated. Is it meeting the current needs of all members?
- A successful plan touches everyone. How can the most people have input into it? How will you provide for people’s voices, their needs, dreams, interests, to be heard as you explore the questions: Who are we as a congregation? What are we about? What has to happen if we are to continue to be disciples of Jesus in the next five years?

- It is important to use a variety of needs assessment approaches to listen to the interests and desires of all the adults of your congregation.
 1. What are the life issues: family, work, suffering/grief, relationships, etc.?
 2. What are the life tasks facing them in their particular age/stage in life?
 3. What are the current milestones/transitions being faced: birth, celebration of first sacraments, career changes, unemployment, retirement, illness, separation and divorce, death of family and friends?
 4. What are the religious needs: connecting faith and life, making moral decisions, living the teachings of the church?
 5. What are the spirituality needs: growing in relationship with God, living as disciples in everyday life, deepening prayer, connecting justice and spirituality, etc.?
 6. What are the experiences and needs of each of the cultural communities in the congregation?

- There will probably be various tracks in a plan for adult faith formation to allow adults to follow their interests and to minister out of their strengths.

- Everything we do teaches. The very act of creating the plan can help church leaders and members deepen their realization of mission. The mission of a congregation and each member is the mission of Christ: to reveal the good news of God's love, to build the Reign of God. How concretely does a specific congregation do that?

Challenge 2. Adult Faith Formation is All-Encompassing; It is Not a "Program."

Even though a typical definition that comes to mind when one hears "adult faith formation" might be: "intentional learning experiences that deepen, expand, and make explicit the learning in faith that is, hopefully, already part of the life of the believing community." Adult faith formation goes well beyond that!

Adult faith formation is much more than programs—much more than intentionally planned learning experiences. Even the intentionally planned learning experiences can (should) happen in a myriad of ways; but it is also obvious there are other ways that faith grows and deepens within the church setting. Consider the following:

- celebrating weekly worship
- participating in outreach activities, especially if there is an opportunity to reflect with others on how the experience personally affected them
- joining with others to sign a petition for a justice issue
- celebrating the sacramental life of the church
- helping build a house with Habitat for Humanity
- prayer groups
- spiritual direction available at or through the church

For twenty centuries the church has lived the mission of Jesus, by helping each person to participate and contribute, to be more fully a faithful, prayerful, serving and learning member of the Body of Christ through: *koinonia* (community), *leiturgia* (prayer and worship), *didache* (teaching), *kerygma* (proclamation), and *diakonia* (outreach).

All of these ways are formational! Each of these ways teaches, help a person grow in faith. Truly, each is adult faith formation. Adult faith formation is much more than

programs; the parish is the curriculum Each of the ways is formational. Everything forms the curriculum, the “course of study,” for our faith growth.

The Gospel message is always being communicated (or contradicted) in everything congregations do: budget decisions, the prayerful atmosphere of all gatherings, the living of the social justice teachings of the faith tradition, the emphasis placed on living the Bible in daily life, etc. All communicate and form the faith of everyone in the congregation.

Do staff, leaders, councils, and committees ask themselves the question: What are we teaching our people about God, faith and life, prayer, church, justice and peace, and the reign of God through what we are saying and doing as a faith community? Adult faith formation is not just about planning six week programs; it is about the way a congregation lives moment by moment. Adult faith formation is much more than programs; it’s about being a learning community. Jane Regan says: “. . . being a community that fosters adult faith is not primarily specific programs, but lifelong learning. . . What needs to be formed is a parish that is a learning community.” She names four significant implications of being a learning community.

1. Adult faith formation within the parish as a learning community is an integral part of parish life at all levels.
2. Structures are created within the parish which provide space for genuine conversation among adults.
3. The wisdom of all members of the parish community is consistently recognized and affirmed.
4. The overarching goal of adult faith formation is to foster a sense of mission rather than simply to enhance membership.

Adult faith formation is much more than programs; it can (and does) happen anywhere.

Most adults only live their faith at church three percent of their time. The rest of their time they are living it at home, in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces, etc. They live it and deepen it by things such as answering a question from a co-worker about what they believe, making Lenten resolutions, praying with their spouse or family, struggling with a decision and talking it over with other people of faith, forgiving at home or in their community, responding with care and compassion. Frequently, busy lives today don’t always allow time for people to show up for scheduled “six-week programs” but that doesn’t mean they’re not learning and growing in faith. What are we doing to enable them to understand and appreciate their continuing growth?

Adult faith formation is much more than programs; it’s about who we are. The search for God, the call to discipleship, is rooted in all we are, all we do. It is the very essence of everything we do. Diana Butler Bass says: churches “are communities of transformation—places where people come to encounter God and know God more deeply.”

The goal of faith formation—to help bring people into intimacy with Jesus Christ—is at the heart of everything that happens in and at the church. Adult faith formation pervades everything; it is happening all the time.

Diana Butler Bass goes on to say, “Adult faith formation is the gathering and strengthening place for learning to be a Christian, for mentoring others in faith, and for practicing faith corporately. It is the heartbeat of churchgoing in the twenty-first century.”

Kathy Coffey, in a National Catholic Reporter podcast, says: “We don’t go to an art museum to see art on the wall there. We go to an art museum to be sensitized to beauty everywhere. It is much the same with church. We go to church to be sensitized to the holiness that is everywhere.”

Our whole church teaches: What are we “teaching” this week and throughout the year?

Challenge 3. Content, Opportunities, and Delivery Systems Need to be Comprehensive

Adults today learn in multiple ways. There was a large body of research conducted during the 1980's about adult learning. The consensus was that roughly 85% of what adults learned then was not in a formal setting, classroom, or lecture hall. That was 10-15 years before the Internet. There has been a significant paradigm shift with adult learning today driven by the Internet and since 2007 by the Wiki world (peer to peer sharing). If 85% was the informal percentage in the 1980's, just think what it would be today. What it will be tomorrow?

We need to ensure that, in every aspect of adult faith formation—content, opportunities, locations and schedules, and delivery systems—everyone is thinking and planning comprehensively.

One tool to help congregations evaluate their present processes and programs, and comprehensively plan for the future is “What Are We Providing for Adult Faith Growth?” (go to <http://www.janetschaeffler.com/AFF-Helps.html>). As the directions for this process state, looking at the delivery systems is as important as the content. Not every need has to be responded to with a “three-week program,” “a lecture series.” There are multiple delivery systems available today. Are we expanding our understanding and conviction of the many ways, places, methods which enable adult learning today?

Challenge 4. Motivation to Learn When Facing Life's Transitions

As crucial as it is to have designed and scheduled opportunities for ongoing faith formation in congregations, take a moment to reflect on your own life or your family's life. When were the life-changing moments?

Probably most of them happened outside of “pre-planned” self or family improvement sessions or adult faith formation sessions. Upon reflection, most people realize that usually their deepest faith growth occurred during the unpredictable situations—and even crises—in everyday life.

Diane Tickton Schuster names this reality:

Adulthood is filled with transitions: geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, empty nests, unanticipated illness, divorce, and the loss of loved ones. In times of transition, most people experience feelings of disorientation and tend to question personal priorities; they may seek to “finish unfinished business” or develop new dimensions of their lives. More often than not, adults in transition perceive educational institutions as important resources during times of change. They look to education to acquire new meaning perspectives and frameworks that can help regain ‘order and stability’ in their lives.

This reality is also affirmed by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson as they summarize the research which constitutes the foundation of adult learning theory: “Adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects. Experience is the richest resource for adults’ learning; therefore the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.”

As crucial as congregations are at these times of transitions, Rex Miller reminds us that our response, our walking with people during transitions, takes many forms; it's not only information. “Discipleship is not a small group or classroom topic. It is a lab project, a choreographed dance, an art taught under the eye of a master.”

Thus, the task for churches is to be aware of all the transitions which are touching the lives of people today. Since adult faith formation is all-encompassing, what are the

programs, processes, support, resources, and even challenges, which people need during the various transition times?

Challenge 5. The Quest for Spirituality—for Living Faith

All we need to do is listen to today's adults for five minutes and it becomes obvious that they are searching for ways to connect faith and life, to experience God, to live spiritually and faithfully in their everyday world, to probe for ways to answer—and live—the questions of the day. They are searching for life, for living, not simply knowing.

In *The Future of Faith*, Harvey Cox divides church history into three ages: 1) *The Age of Faith* (the time of Jesus to 400) – a period that emphasize Christianity was a way of life based upon faith (trust in Jesus); 2) *The Age of Belief* (400-1900) – a period that emphasized creeds and beliefs (belief about Jesus); and 3) *The Age of the Spirit* (1900-today) – a period that emphasizes Christianity as an experience of Jesus. This time is also concerned about practicing the faith, rather than simply knowing about it.

The Gallup Guide: Reality Check for 21st Century Churches affirms the development of the Age of the Spirit: “The churches of America, in these opening years of the twenty-first century, face an historic moment of opportunity. Surveys record an unprecedented desire for religious and spiritual growth among all people in all walks of life and in every region of the nation. There is an intense searching for spiritual moorings, a hunger for God.”

In *Christianity After Religion*, Diana Butler Bass reminds us:

Belief is not going to disappear, and it will not become a relic of the religious past. Rather, as religion gives way to spirituality, the question of belief shifts from what to how. . . . *What* is not the issue—the world of religion is full of what. Instead, they have asked *how*. Belief

questions have become, ‘How do you believe?’ ‘How could I ever believe?’ ‘How does this make sense?’ ‘How would believing this make my life different?’ or ‘How would this change the world?’

How moves us around in the question. Instead of being above the information, giving an expert opinion about something, how weaves our lives with the information as we receive, renew, reflect, and act upon what we sought. How provides actionable information. . . How is a question of meaning and purpose that pushes people into a deeper engagement in the world, rather than memorizing facts.”

What does all this mean for congregational life and for adult faith formation?

- When we plan for adult faith formation, where do we begin—with church questions or life questions?
- Does every opportunity of adult faith formation, help or challenge people to ask the “so what” question? What does this have to do with my everyday life? What am I going to do about it?
- Do all of our opportunities engage people in the quest for spirituality, for living what I know?

Challenge 6: Formation for Critical Thinking

We live in a challenging, constantly-changing world. Adult faith formation invites the faith community to look beyond itself to the wider mission of the church. One of the goals of adult faith formation is to “call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world. The Church and its adult faithful have a mission in and to the world. . . faith formation seeks to help each adult believer become ‘more willing and able to be a Christian disciple in the world.’” (USCCB #72-73)

To be disciples we are called to make a difference in the world, to transform the world. In the midst of that responsibility today, there are unprecedented challenges, questions, and actions waiting for us. Mature adult Christians can respond because they have grown and developed several characteristics: living as a person of wisdom, not only knowledge; the ability of discernment, and skills of critical thinking. Do our programs and processes provide an environment for formation and transformation, in addition to information? Are we equipping people to live and act as a disciple in today's real world?

Challenge 7: Embracing the Digital World

Life is not the same as it was even ten years ago. It never will be again. Much of the change and way of life we experience today is because we are immersed in a digital world, even when we don't recognize it. Fortunately we have many helps and supports to aid us in navigating this world, especially for adult faith formation. (See resources below.)

The best practices studies often illustrate that the challenge is that congregations are the last to embrace the potential of all that communications technology offers. Some best practices respondents said: "We aren't very advanced in the world of technology." "We are just starting to use technology." "We could use some help in this area!"

Countless opportunities can be lost for connection, for hospitality, for formation if the churches are not active contributors and users of all that is possible in the digital world.

Website Resources

Catholic Tech Talk:

<http://catholictectalk.com>

CHURCHSMO: Simplifying Social Media for Church & Ministry

<http://churchsmo.com>

Internet Toolbox for Churches:

<http://www.internettoolboxforchurches.com>

Catechesis 2.0:

<http://catechesis20.wordpress.com/web-2-0>

Book Resources

Baab, Lynne. *Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul*. Herndon: Alban Books, 2008.

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Challenge 8: The Challenges of the Digital World

As we just explored, our digital world is here to stay and has unimaginable potential for adult faith formation. The possibilities only multiply each day. At the same time, there can be consequences and implications which might be undesirable. Can we serve as a balancing influence, helping people consciously navigate this brand new world, rather than be controlled by it?

There are many implications of today's instant, digital world. We have access to much information; yet, information and knowledge are not the same as wisdom. With so much available to us, do we keep searching for more and more or do we also take time for reflection, for assimilation? Is speed effecting our decisions? The crush of technology often forces us to respond immediately. Do we blink when we need to think? E-mail, social media and 24-hour news are relentless. Our time cycle gets faster every day. Do we take the time to step back and think about the big picture?

The wisdom of our traditions provides a lifestyle and spiritual practices which empower people to live in this digital world, maximizing its potential as well as coping with some of the undesired consequences.

We need to accentuate the practices of reflection and meditation, the restorative powers of Sabbath time, the call to live simply and slowly, significant time and opportunities for sacred conversations, and reminders and methods for living in the present moment.

Conclusion

Adult faith formation needs the commitment, energy, and enthusiasm of staff, leaders, and teams to be effective and to move ahead.

... we move ahead full of hope, knowing this vision of adult faith formation can become reality. Jesus the Risen One is still with us, meeting us on the pathways of our lives, sharing our concerns, enlightening us with his word, strengthening us with his presence, nourishing us in the breaking of the bread, and sending us forth to be his witnesses. ... Let us do our part with creativity and vigor, our hearts aflame with love to empower adults to know and live the message of Jesus. This is the Lord's work. (USCCB)

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The Challenges and Opportunities for Faith Formation with Maturing Adults

Janet Schaeffler, OP

A few years ago, the mother of a friend of mine went to the doctor because of pain in her left arm. After waiting a long time to see the doctor on the day of her appointment, the doctor quickly and superficially examined her and then said, “Well, what can you expect? You’re 71, you know.” Louise immediately responded, “My other arm is the same age and it feels absolutely fine.”

Might that real-life episode be symbolic—a representation of all that goes on today, in every area of life, regarding those who are growing older? Even though there may be increased understanding and more holistic practices today, it is still a long journey to move beyond the heresy of ageism in our society, and even in our congregations.

Ageism has been described as the prejudice and discriminating behavior toward senior adults resulting from holding myths and stereotypes about aging and older persons. Ageism holds that chronological age, in itself, determines the personality, behavior and social traits of all senior adults. Ageism implies that one age group is superior to another and the undercurrent is usually

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that “older” is inferior.

As with any prejudice, we are often unaware of all the beliefs we hold, all the things we do and say. Becoming more aware of our attitudes, myths and stereotypes, and perhaps even hang-ups, regarding growing older will influence our approach and ministry with senior adults.

Describing Maturing Adults

Foundational to our ministry with and for maturing adults are the words we use. Angelita Fenker says: “Never treat ourselves as ‘old.’ Never treat an older person as ‘old.’ Never let anyone treat us as ‘old.’” It’s interesting that at no other time in life are disabilities equated with personhood except when one is labeled ‘elderly.’ In our society, ‘elderly’ or ‘old’ connotes diminishment and finality. If we use ‘older,’ that term fits everyone. Everyone is getting older!

Many people today are using the word ‘eldering’ rather than ‘elderly’ or even ‘elder.’ The Eldering Institute (<http://eldering.org>) asserts that eldering is “transforming our experience of growing older, relating to people of all ages with respect and dignity, living life as a contribution, creating our collective future, learning and growing throughout our lives.”

In March 2009, *The Midweek Herald* in Devon, England called for a ban on the word ‘retirement.’ The word comes from the French, meaning “to withdraw.” Honey Lancaster-James in the *Death of Retirement Report* (Standard Life) writes, “(The word retirement) no longer represents the hopes and aspirations of the baby boomer generation. . . . The report followed a survey which found half of 46 to 65 year olds in the Southwest plan to travel more in their long-term future. In contrast, only 39 percent of their parents’ generation planned to travel more at retirement. Almost half of those surveyed hoped to learn a new skill, such as a hobby or language—five times as many as their parents.”

In reality, the word ‘retirement’ no longer has an accurate meaning. We never really ‘retire.’ We just move from one phase of life to another.

Many Groups within Eldering

Who are today’s maturing population?
Richard P. Johnson identifies three groups:

- *Boomers* (55-72 years old): This stage of life development is best seen as a time of growth, challenging (in a positive way), stimulating, engaging, and participatory.
- *Builders* (73+): The distinguishing factor is a general physical slowing down. Builders’ minds may be just as sharp and quick as always, but they suffer some physical diminishment.
- *Elders* (those who live very long lives): This is the name that Johnson gives to those maturing adults who have experienced some form of physical or cognitive debilitation. Many in this group require special assistance or personal care.

Colleen Johnson and Barbara M. Barer place people into three groups (focusing, though, on loss and disability, rather than continuing growth):

- The *functionally fit survivors* who suffer only moderate disabilities.
- The *chronically disabled* who manage to live with a high level of disability.
- The *increasingly disabled* who require rising levels of assistance.

Heights Christian Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico affectionately divides their maturing members into three groups:

- *The Go-Go’s*: You all are still full of energy and vitality. Age hasn’t seemed to catch up with you yet, although there are signs. You’re still physically

active, able to go almost anywhere—even though sometimes you sneak a nap before you do. You also may be in the last stage of denial!

- *The Slow-Go's*: As the name implies, you're slowing down and feeling your age. You still like to go but just not as long. You have been known to take a nap before you go to bed. You're the life of the party, even if it lasts until 8 pm!
- *The No-Go's*: The only thing holding you back is probably your health. Your spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, but your wisdom has not diminished. You're a delight to visit, have a great attitude about your circumstances and are a testimony of God's love to those around you.

Donald R. Koepke divides the eldering into four general categories: the active, the transitional, and the frail elderly, as well as the caregivers.

Current Statistics

Fortunately, there are more studies and research happening today than ever before, probably because 10,000 Baby Boomers are turning 65 every day. Let's explore some of the statistics, because they have implications for faith formation and ministry. (Statistics are from Transgenerational Design Matters <http://transgenerational.org/aging/demographics.htm>).

- Never before in human history has our planet contained so many older people or such a large percentage of them. This has not always been the case. As late as 1930, America's older population numbered less than 7 million, only 5.4% of the population. Today, one out of every 9 Americans is "old." Another former youth turns 50 every 8 seconds. Those age 65 and older now exceed 35 million, a number poised to explode.

January 2011 ushered in the first of approximately 77 million Baby Boomers, born from 1946 through 1964 who are surging toward the gates of retirement.

- The 201 U.S. Census shows seniors increasing faster than younger populations, raising the nation's median age from 35.3 in 2000 to 37.2 in 2010, with seven states having a median age of 40 or older. Nearly 40 million Americans are 65+, greater than the combined populations of New York, London and Moscow. By 2050, those 65+ will soar to over 80 million. (<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>)
- Each year more than 3.5 million Boomers turn 55. (In the U.S. every eight seconds a Baby Boomer turns 65.) According to the UN Population Division, 1 in 5 people are expected to be 65 or older by 2035. By 2050, the U.N. estimates that the proportion of the world's population age 65 and over will more than double, from 7.6% today to 16.2%.
- The gender ratio (the number of men per 100 women) changes over the human life span. Surprisingly, 105 male births occur for every 100 female births. As time passes, the number of males continues to exceed females until the third decade (20-29). From that age on, women increasingly outnumber men. For every 100 females in the 65-74 age group, we find only 86 males. Their number continues to drop to 72 in the 75-84 age group. For the old-old groups (85 and older) the gender ratio becomes even more pronounced expanding to an astounding 49 men for every 100 women.

- The dramatic growth in numbers and proportions, increased life expectancies, and energetic life styles, now enables us to live 20 to 25% of our lives in active retirement. Boomers will continue to bike, hike, swim, sail, and ski, play softball and basketball. They'll move to the mountains, beaches, islands, and college towns where the physical and intellectual action is. A survey by Del Web showed that half of them expect to work at least part-time once they retire. And they'll want offices in their homes, with high speed internet connections for those two or more computers (which 40 percent of them already have) As LeRoy Hanneman, president and CEO of Del Web says, "Boomers should be called Zoomers."

Research on Learning in the Eldering Years

In her book *The Third Chapter: Passion, Risk and Adventure in the 25 Years after 50*, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot interviewed women and men who were redefining themselves as new learners and discovered that learning within the Third Chapter is different from the way learning traditionally takes place in schools. "Competition, speed, the single pursuit of achievement, masking failure are things we all learn to do in school. The learning and productivity we have in our Third Chapter has to do with patience, with collaboration, with restraint and incrementalism."

Lawrence-Lightfoot discovered that Third Chapter learners go through four stages when they are new learners:

1. They are deeply curious about the subject they have chosen to study.
2. They let go of their fear of failure, and their fear of making a fool of themselves.
3. They display a willingness to be vulnerable.

4. They develop empathy and put themselves in the place of those who will become their teachers – often people from different backgrounds, cultures, geographies and generations.

Another development, the desire for on-going learning, results in the reality that the eldering are designing their own learning opportunities. Their familiarity with the internet and various forms of social media certainly contributes to this. One intriguing example is the University of the Third Age (<http://harrowu3a.co.uk/default.htm>). U3A "aims to encourage men and women no longer in full-time employment to join together in educational creative/leisure activities. The word 'University' is used in its original sense of people coming together to share and pursue learning in all its forms."

Research on Spirituality in the Eldering Years

Many researchers agree that spirituality deepens as we age. Richard P. Johnson's constant theme is that "As we mature, our spiritual pace quickens!"

Today, researchers and practitioners are pointing out the changing face of spirituality. The website *Transforming Life after 50* states: "Boomers are embracing spirituality in their own unique way, transforming the religious landscape of America and giving birth to a broader 'spiritual marketplace' that incorporates many spiritual perspectives, including both traditional and non-traditional religious communities." Boomers are seeking "a self-reflective quest for individual wholeness, a search for depth and meaning, as well as guidance for living one's life. As Boomers grow older, they tend to recognize that spirituality must be cultivated through practice, and that there will be no 'quick fix' when it comes to spiritual depth. Spirituality will most likely remain a significant aspect of their lives for the remainder of their lives."

(<http://www.transforminglifeafter50.org/midlife-trends/spirituality>).

During a workshop in the fall of 2009 at Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, Rev. James Shopshire, Sr., professor of Sociology of Religion at Wesley Theological Seminary and Rev. Ramonia Lee, chaplain of the Interfaith Center at Leisure World recounted the needs and aspirations of today's maturing population. Shopshire said Boomers as a whole "have a distrust of institutional authority, including the church. 'I believe in God but I don't believe in the church' is the way Boomers express their religion." Citing the statistics that Boomers are returning to church (in the 1970s only 30 percent attended services, today 43 percent attend services), Shopshire asked, "What do Boomers seek in a church? They want a church open to spiritual experience, Bible studies that stress the practical, a healthy emphasis on relationships, fewer titles and less formality."

Lee said, "Boomers want to link having a 'spiritual experience' with 'worship,' and expect worship to be participatory with a friendly and casual atmosphere, visual stimulation (using screens, not hymn books), and arts and music. They want variety in worship, service and study, and are insistent on excellence. They prefer worship that leaves room for interpretation, spiritual reflection and personal application. They are open to theological interpretation as long as it is free of dogmatism."

"If the church is just religious, or just spiritual, it doesn't meet the needs of Boomers," Shopshire said.

"One method of adult Christian education many like," Shopshire said, "is to receive by e-mail a news story, text and questions, which they see ahead of time then can meet on Monday to discuss, 'God's views on the news.'"

Lee commented that age-segregated ministries do not appeal to Boomers; they will take advantage of every possible opportunity to mix with the generations. They want

partnerships with other groups in the church and the community, including mission groups, choirs, coffee conversation groups, even confirmation classes with older members studying with the children. "

Needs of the Eldering

Much of the literature and research identifies the needs of the elderying population. These can be the foundation upon which to build a practical and compassionate ministry and adult formation opportunities with/for the elderying.

Describing the elderying, David Gallagher writes, "We love to be with friends, and we need a warm, loving and caring church family to do that. A lot of us have family members spread out all over the land and we don't get to see them as often as we would like. But because our church friends are close by and accessible and we have more time, we love to be with each other for times of fellowship and activities."

David O. Moberg (2001) suggests the following overlapping categories of needs:

- *The Need for Meaning and Purpose:* The need for meaning and purpose relates closely to the deeply ingrained desire to maintain one's personal dignity and self-esteem.
- *The Need for Love and Relatedness:* Sharing companionship, conversation, intimacy, laughter, a hug, or caressing touch and giving oneself to others by work or service help to satisfy this need.
- *The Need for Forgiveness:* Most of us have experienced failures ... these can be resolved through accepting the forgiveness of God and others.
- *The Need for Spiritual Integration:* We need to know and to feel ourselves spiritually integrated beyond our own existence into an absolute order of existence.

- *The Need to Cope with Losses*: Even losses can enrich one's life journey for each provides an opportunity for spiritual growth and development.
- *The Need for Freedom to Raise Questions*: Usually it is cathartic for people to share ... questions with a sympathetic listener.
- *The Need for Flexibility*: old age is a period of life in which many changes are imposed upon people, despite whether they desire and seek them.
- *The Need to Prepare for Dying and Death*: Much of this preparation seems purely physical and materialistic, but also old emotional accounts from past mistakes and grudges can be settled.
- *The Need to Be Useful*: This is a form of the need to love others and, in turn, to receive love from others.
- *The Need to Be Thankful*: The life review can stimulate a more balanced perspective that includes one's happy experiences, profitable accomplishments, and good circumstances.

Gifts of the Eldering

The Eldering provide a diversity of gifts that benefit the whole faith community.

The Gift of Memory: In *Growing Old in Christ*, the essayists write of the importance of holding on to the Christian story, which gives meaning to individual stories and provides "rich resources to make possible friendship between the elderly and, perhaps most important, becoming and remaining friends with ourselves as we age." Since Christian communities live by memory, since the church's central feast is a feast of memory, the eldering have a unique and essential role in the church. They are the keepers of the meaning, the repository and tellers of the story of the communion of saints.

The Gift of Wisdom: Rabbi Marc Disick of Temple Sinai in Stamford, CT believes that the most important thing we can do for older

people is make them feel that their wisdom and years count for something.

(<http://www.pbs.org/lifepart2/watch/season-2/spirituality-and-aging>)

The reflection from former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan becomes truer each day: "Trees grow stronger over the years, rivers wider. Likewise, with age, human beings gain immeasurable depth and breadth of experience and wisdom. That is why older persons should be not only respected; they should be utilized as the rich resource to society that they are.

The Gift of More Developed Abilities: In the July-August 2012 issue of *Smithsonian* magazine, Helen Fields recounts several studies illustrating that the mind gets sharper at a number of vitally important abilities, even while certain skills decline, as we get older. In a University of Illinois study, older traffic controllers excelled at their cognitively taxing jobs. . . They were expert at navigating, juggle multiple aircraft simultaneously and avoiding collisions. For a 2010 study, researchers at the University of Michigan presented 'Dear Abby' letters to 200 people and asked what advice they would give. Subjects in their 60s were better than younger ones at imagining different points of view, thinking of multiple resolutions and suggesting compromises.

Foundational Guidelines

There are several foundational guidelines that are important to remember for ministry and faith formation with the eldering.

1. Each person is unique. No one can be placed into a category according to their age. As Ronni Bennett said on her blog: "One of the most striking features of old age is its diversity. We age at dramatically different rates and some people in their fifties can be decrepit while some in their nineties are as sharp and nearly as capable as in their mid-years." (<http://www.timegoesby.net/weblog/2012/08/what-is-it-like-to->

[be-old.html](#)) Therefore, ministry for and with the eldering has to be multi-faceted.

2. There are numerous and varied needs within this population.
3. There is an abundance of gifts and wisdom within these members of our congregations.
4. Because today's older adults are living longer, are healthy and energetic, ministries need to be viewed as being *with* and *through* older adults rather than *to* older adults.
5. Aging needs to be recognized as a normal, natural process, filled with opportunities for continued life and growth, rather than something to fear. Author Amy Hanson dares church leaders to let go of stereotypes about aging and embrace a new paradigm, that older adults are for the most part active, healthy and capable of making significant contributions for the Kingdom of God.
6. In the words of Richard P. Johnson: we "need to dramatically shift our perspective on senior adults away from a deficit perspective and toward an abundance perspective. A deficit perspective leads us to the question, How can we possibly take care of all these older persons? An abundance perspective asks instead, How can we harness the depth of wisdom and well-learned adaptability resident in our senior adults?" (February 2006 Newsletter)
www.senioradultministry.com)
7. Today, perhaps, there should be a shift in the emphasis from the duties of the *elderling to the church* to the *church's duty to the eldering*. When this is done

well, of course, the gifts of the eldering will be called forth for all in the community.

8. Ministry for and with the eldering is not an end in itself; it's not simply a calendar of activities or services to be provided. It seeks to be attentive to, tend to, cultivate, encourage, and deepen a person's spiritual life.
9. Ministry for and with maturing adults needs to be both age-specific and multigenerational.

Ministry and Adult Faith Formation with the Elderling

The twelve guiding principles for ministry with maturing adults, as proposed by Richard Johnson in *Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults*, are a good starting point for developing a ministry with the eldering.

Ministry for maturing adults:

1. Pays attention to three dimensions of growth: spiritual, psychological, and physical
2. Is part of the parish plan
3. Employs styles of teaching and learning unique to the people being served
4. Is based on the idea that God is calling each person in the parish to a profound personal vocation
5. Shifts the focus of parish activity to a broad understanding of ministry that includes shared activities as well as shared growth in faith and life
6. Welcomes elders into mainstream ministries of the parish
7. Embraces a goal of spiritual transformation
8. Offers programming that arises out of the real situation in which elders live

9. Focuses on both interior and exterior growth
10. Is Christ-centered
11. Is developmental, ongoing, and lifelong
12. Honors diversity of age, stage, personality, ethnicity, and spirituality

Donald R. Koepke suggests five categories, which will keep all the aspects of eldering life in balance (these certainly overlap with each other): 1) spiritual development, 2) continued education, 3) opportunities to serve, 4) opportunities to be served, and 5) community building (social interaction) events.

Element #1. Spiritual Development

In many ways, the other four categories can be rolled into this one, since spirituality touches all of life. Our spiritual growth is meshed with every other aspect of our lives. We are holistic people (body, mind and spirit). As we grow in one area, we also grow in the others. Our spirituality expands with all growth, when we're open and aware.

David Moberg (1990) notes that among all change opportunities in human life, the one that provides the most opportunity for continuing growth in the eldering years is the spiritual. By its very nature, aging can foster spiritual development by inviting people into the spiritual tasks of discovering, pondering, integrating, surrendering, growing and companioning. Consider the following reflection questions.

- ✓ Are prayer and reflective opportunities provided, opportunities which connect with the current life experiences, questions, hopes and fears of the eldering?
- ✓ Can we begin prayer groups where persons of deep faith, and perhaps limited physical resources, can pray for the needs of others?
- ✓ Do we realize that Scripture study, at this time in life, can be deeper because

of the rich life experiences of these eldering participants?

- ✓ Do sermons contain illustrations of the experiences of older people?
- ✓ How do we help people see their life holistically?
- ✓ Do we ritualize the transitions of life in this age? Is there a prayer, a blessing, for those beginning retirement? Can we create rituals to acknowledge and celebrate each decade of life? Is there a celebration of driving careers, planned on a regular basis for those who have given up their driver's licenses?
- ✓ Can we develop rituals for transitions which members can celebrate in their homes?
- ✓ Are religious services televised and/or recorded?
- ✓ Since forgiveness is a need, do we plan reconciliation services, focusing on the healing of memories?
- ✓ How do we acknowledge the caregivers in our congregations? These are often the eldering ministering to other eldering.
- ✓ Have we ever matched up a young family with each older person in the congregation, inviting the family to pray for their person, writing them a note of appreciation and care?
- ✓ Are older persons invited into all the ministries of the church, especially the liturgical ministries: ushers, readers, ministers of hospitality, etc.? (In reality, many older persons are already there; they have been their whole lives and don't slow down as they get mature in age.)
- ✓ Do we offer opportunities, mentors and guides, for spiritual direction?

Element #2. Continued Learning

Today's eldering person craves for continuing learning. There are no dividing lines. We need to consider on-going religious learning as well

as learning which, at first glance, might not be considered religious.

When adult religious education concentrates solely on topics perceived as sacred or holy, the implication is that a host of educational needs and interests arising out of daily life are trivial, a sort of second-class reality. What shapes a person's religious response, however, is the totality of his (her) experience and not simply that part of life experience perceived as sacred. Likewise, a person's religious response influences the manner in which he (she) experiences all of life and not just a segment of life designated as sacred." (McKenzie and Harton)

Since all experience has the potential for learning, the division between sacred and secular fades away. In viewing life's experiences as God-given, and our capacity to take note and organize those experiences into meaningful frameworks as a gift of grace, our journey of lifelong learning is at every moment a sacred one. Whether the experience and struggle to make meaning of it are painful or joyful, the whole process is sacred. Whether the learning event takes place within a religious context or outside of one, the moment is God-given. Lifelong learning and the faith journey are one and the same." (Brillinger)

People in their eldering years are seeking to understand this one-ness. It is part of the aging process. Consider these ideas.

- *Schools of Theology.* In May 2010 an article in *U.S. Catholic* magazine advocated for Yellow Banana Schools of Theology in our churches. ("I don't buy green bananas. I may not still be here when they ripen and turn yellow.") This proposal was precipitated by the realization that most congregations give much time,

resources, and personnel to children, and some to adults, but very little to the eldering.

These Yellow Banana Schools would be an "endeavor powered by the urgency of age. The courses, like a ripe banana, should not only be short but also sweet. Yellow not green! Short and interesting if not fun. The sweetener would be the choice of a dynamic, questioning facilitator to run the sessions instead of an answer-giving teacher or a dull, lecturing scholar. Most courses would run one session, seldom two, and never three. The curriculum would be determined mostly by the students themselves, because as we age, our felt needs increasingly become our real needs."

- *Practical Information:* The eldering need optimistic, growth-filled, practical information regarding a maturing spirituality. They welcome how-to's which enable them to stay active, energetic, involved and open to spiritual growth and change which will affect their entire life.
- *Life Issues:* Congregations can provide workshops, resources and support aimed at addressing the realities of the eldering process, such as simplifying life, sharing faith with grandchildren, caring for grandchildren, managing the transitions to a new job and of retirement, managing the empty-nest reality, living in a marriage relationships in the older years, discovering/developing artistic and creative expression, traveling, understanding wills/living wills/organ donations/official forms (Social Security, Medicare), and living with loss and discerning the meaning of suffering. One example of a series helping older adults determine their funeral plans can be explored at

<http://www.janetschaeffler.com/Best-Practices.html>. See #13.

Richard Johnson suggests a program of mini-courses to be offered for the older adults, such as: “The 12 Keys of Successful Aging,” “How to Find Peace and Purpose,” “A Faith-based Perspective of Sickness,” “A Holy Understanding of Wellness,” “Praying: the Heart of the Spiritual Journey.”

- *Lifelong Learning*: One of the interesting undertakings for on-going learning is taking place in California: Progressive Christians Uniting (http://www.progressivechristiansuniting.org/PCU/Progressive_Christians_Uniting.html), founded by a 78-year old emeritus professor of theology. This endeavor has taken up issues and concerns that impact today’s society: economics, politics, social ethics, etc.
- *Support Groups*: Support groups can be developed in which older adults have a safe place for conversation regarding their various needs: e.g. caregiving, inevitable losses of older life, adjusting to “retirement,” widow/widower groups.
- *Book Clubs*: Book clubs can be a place for deepening one’s understanding, and sharing experiences, of growing older. Consider books such as the following:

A Deepening Love Affair: God’s Gift in Later Years by Jane Thibault (Upper Room Press, 1993)

Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, 2011)

The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully by Joan Chittister (Bluebridge, 2010)

After 50: Spiritually Embracing Your Own Wisdom Years by Robert Wicks (Paulist Press, 2009)

The Enduring Heart: Spirituality for the Long Haul by Wilkie Au (Paulist Press, 2000)

30 Lessons for Living: Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans by Karl Pillemer, Ph.D. (Hudson Street Press, 2011).

- *Life Review*: One of the very helpful activities for the maturing adult is a life review: a way to intensify gratitude. They may be expressed in a variety of ways: writing memoirs, previewing and assembling photo albums, taping memoirs, through art, creating memory gardens, developing family histories or genealogies, making trips to family homes or pilgrimages to locations of spiritual significance, autobiographies or life histories. To read about how one church invited/helped its eldering to compose a spiritual/life autobiography, see <http://store.pastoralplanning.com/beprspau.html>.
- *Legacy*: In addition to life reviews, invite older adults to reflect on their legacy. What are they passing on to the 7th generation (a Native American tradition)? A reflective time to think about the following questions, and perhaps write them down for their families, can be very affirming:
 - What are four of the spiritual gifts God has given you?
 - To whom would you like to give these gifts?
 - What are four of the talents God has given you?
 - To whom would you like to leave these talents?

- *Parish Nurse Programs:* Parish nurse programs not only provide numerous services for the eldering, but can also sponsor many educational opportunities related to health, safe living, transitions, etc.
- *Service:* Connecting with another theme, the desire to serve, invite older adults to a process of learning leading toward a deepened commitment: www.justfaith.org.

Here are several questions to consider when design programming.

1. Are educational opportunities offered during the day as well as the evening to accommodate some of the eldering who would prefer daytime schedules?
2. Do we regularly analyze the message that our programs give older adults: e.g. listing programs as “family-centered;” involving them as teachers or worship leaders; blend of old and new hymns; intergenerational seating; accessibility and clear signage at church?
3. Do we use the potential of technology, in all its forms, so that the eldering (as well as harried younger members of our churches) can learn and participate from their homes? For instance, your local phone company can arrange for a conference call. The teacher (at church) can use the church phone; people at home will participate via their phones. You can link the older adults with online sessions of interest to them. (Of course, because they have varied interests and each person is unique, this will be a broad range of topics.) One possibility: “Autumn Blessings: Spirituality in the Second Half of Life” (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/stm/c21online>).

Faith formation opportunities for the maturing population needs to include various methods:

- Individualized: online opportunities, reading, videos, etc.
- Within home life: conversations, prayer and rituals, etc.
- In small groups: various topics; taking place in various locations (church, restaurants, libraries, homes, etc.)
- In large groups: retreats, workshops, speakers, etc.
- The life of the church: worship, service, ministry and leadership
- Within the community and world: opportunities offered by various civic, religious, educational organizations

A congregation doesn't have to do everything. Become a clearing house, a curator, by alerting older persons to the array of educational and service opportunities in your area. Here are several resources and organizations that can help you in providing programs/services:

- AARP
www.aarp.org
- The Alzheimers's Association
www.alz.org
- Area Agency on Aging
<http://www.n4a.org>
- The Christian Association Serving Adult Ministries Network
www.gocasa.org
- Duke University
www.learnmore.duke.edu
- Forum on Religion and Spirituality in Aging
<http://www.asaging.org/forum-religion-spirituality-and-aging-forsa>
- iTunes University
www.apple.com/education/itunes-u
- Health Ministries Association
www.hmassoc.org
- The National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
www.naela.org

The National Alliance for Caregiving

www.caregiving.org

The National Council on Aging

www.ncoa.org

Osher Lifelong Learning:

<http://usm.maine.edu/olli/national>

Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries
Network

www.poamn.org

Senior Adult Ministry:

www.senioradultministry.com

TED talks & RE-TED

www.ted.com

[http://gnmforum.blogspot.com/search/
label/RE-TED](http://gnmforum.blogspot.com/search/label/RE-TED)

Element #3. Opportunities to Serve

In addressing this facet of senior adult ministry, Donald R. Koepke contends that “Human beings have a spiritual need to be involved in issues and people beyond themselves. Older adults, with their education and experience, provide for a wealth of needs within a community. However, their conflict of time and interest often forms a barrier to serving. There are ways to avoid these barriers. . . Opportunities for older adults to serve are possible, no matter what their physical capabilities.”

Many experts and researchers challenge congregations to create compelling opportunities for the eldering, “For this generation of older Americans, volunteerism is about something much more substantial and real than taking up time in their day. . . it is about filling a need, their need to both make a difference and be involved” (Peter Hart Associates).

As we look at some opportunities in which today’s older adults participate, it is also helpful to remember that an ideal adult faith formation process is to invite/help people to reflection *after* the service: Has my worldview changed? What happened to me because of this service? How will my life be different because I participated in this opportunity?

Examples of service include:

- The BOLD Adult Ministry (Being our Lord’s Delight) at Chapelwood United Methodist Church has over 300 projects in which older adults can be involved, including Habitat for Humanity, missions trips, and elementary school mentors. (http://www.chapelwood.org/MinistryMaster.cfm?Ministry_ID=4)
- Adopting a child/family in the congregation.
- Developing a garden plot for older adults who enjoy gardening. Someone can do the heavy preparation of the garden, but provide tools for older persons to use in planting and tending the garden. Flowers from the garden can be used in church; produce from the garden can be used for an intergenerational meal and/or donated to homeless shelters.
- Quilting of prayer quilts for those who are ill; some to be raffled with proceeds for service causes.
- Providing transportation for those no longer able to drive.
- Being active in such programs as Befrienders Ministry (<http://www.befrienderministry.org>) or Stephen Ministries (<http://www.stephenministries.org>).
- Being involved in all the church ministries, especially visiting the homebound and those in hospitals.
- Tutoring after school.
- Becoming big brothers/big sisters to students in a school close to the church.

- Searching out the many ways the generations can be involved together. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot remarked: A bridging of the generations is crucial to “recognize the wisdom that people in the Third Chapter bring: their resilience, their wisdom, their patience, their skills; and what it is that people in the first chapter might offer: their cultural currency, their comfort with new ideas, their technological skills, their impatience and ambitiousness. We need to be in conversation with each other and know each other’s experiences and stories.” (<http://www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu/learning/LD323.html>)
- One example of bringing the generations together in service is exemplified at Grace Presbyterian Church, Houston, TX where they participate in Church Apartment Ministry, maintaining an apartment for families of patients coming for cancer treatment at the Texas Medical Center. The Encore 50+ Ministry coordinates this outreach; the young adults of the congregation do most of the cleaning and maintenance as well as helping the families move in. The older adults visit the families and patient, offer to bring them to church, and provide meals. (<http://www.churchapartmentministry.org/apartment/home.php>)

Here are several resources and organizations that can help you.

- Action without Borders Idealist: an interactive site where individuals and organizations can exchange resources www.idealists.org
- Christian Appalachian Project: an interdenominational organization that serves the needy in Appalachia www.christianapp.org

Corporation for National and Community Service: sponsors “Get Involved,” opportunities tailored to the skills and experience of those 55 and older www.getinvolved.gov

Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC): provides men and women, most age 50 or better, opportunities to serve others and to transform lives. IVC matches the talents of experienced Volunteers with the greatest social needs of our time. <http://www.ivcusa.org>

Peace Corps: welcomes older Americans to give something back while seeing the world www.peacecorps.gov

Element #4. Opportunities to Be Served

A fourth element of congregational ministry to the eldering is caring for their unique needs. Here are several examples of serving the eldering.

- It is easy for older, homebound members to become disconnected from the congregation. Churches need to do everything possible to know who their homebound and hospitalized members are, and have processes in place to include them (visits, phone calls, sending notes, birthday/thinking of you cards and the church bulletin, placing their name on the church’s prayer list, TV programming of church events, services provided, etc.)
- Church members who are sent forth from the Sunday service to bring Eucharist to those unable to be present
- Providing companions to doctors, shopping for those who need assistance, organizing trips to help adults who can’t get out on their own

(the library, a movie, concert, festival, or day of prayer)

- Telephone reassurance programs for those who are homebound
- Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston, ministers to the caregivers and those they serve. “The Gathering” is a day of care providing a few hours of fellowship for those who have had strokes, have dementia or Alzheimer’s, and the frail elderly who are isolated from normal activities. It also gives a time of respite for their caregivers. (http://houstongrace.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=251&Itemid=280)
- StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. The same could be done in our congregations, inviting the older members to share their stories, their gifts, and the wisdom of life. This could be preserved within the church library. <http://www.npr.org/series/4516989/storycorps>
- The homebound and hospitalized can be invited to be a part of the ministry of prayer of the congregation, praying for the needs of the community.
- Congregations becoming aware of how the needs of older adults are met in the community: public transportation, adult day care programs, assisted living and nursing facilities, meals on wheels, accessibility of public places. Share what is learned with the congregation as well as continuing to search out ways to improve them.

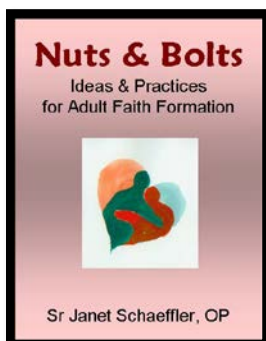
Element #5. Community-Building Events

The need for relationships and interaction with others continues throughout life. There are many ways our congregational life and programs can build community.

- 2nd Half Ministries at Northshore Baptist Church, Kirkland, WA hosts the Baby Boomers Bash, designed to celebrate the Baby Boomers turning 60 and affirm people at this stage in life. A glance at their website illustrates the depth of their ministry to older adults. (<http://www.nsb.org/connect/2nd-half>)
- In Marietta, GA, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, through “Life After Fifty” provides a comprehensive ministry. One of its features is the Magnolia Ball for over 300 nursing home and assisted living residents and the homebound members of the church. (<http://www.johnsonferry.org/Ministries/AdultMinistries/LifeAfterFifties.aspx>)
- Many congregations/older adults within the congregation do a superb job of planning and hosting events: brunches, dinners, card parties, trips.
- Community building also includes inviting participants to get to know one another better. For ideas and resources check out the following websites.
 - www.treegroup.info
 - www.wholeperson.com
 - <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/icebreaker-activities-for-adults.html>
 - <http://voices.yahoo.com/fun-icebreakers-adult-groups-380752.html>
 - <http://adulthood.about.com/od/icebreakers/tp/toptenicebreakers.htm>
 - <http://www.askives.com/funny-icebreaker-questions-for-adults.html>

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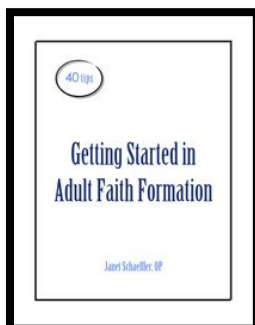
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- Transgenerational Design Matters (<http://transgenerational.org/aging/demographics.htm>).



Nuts & Bolts: Planning & Best Practices for Adult Formation (eResource)

Janet Schaeffler, OP (New London: Twenty-Publications, 2011)
(Order from: <http://store.pastoralplanning.com/iboplbeprfor.html>)

Nuts & Bolts is a unique tool with a series of 23 6-10 page "tools" to help you plan and implement adult faith formation—initiatives which you as parish leaders can launch in your communities to increase participation in Adult Faith Formation.



Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation (eBook)

Janet Schaeffler, OP (faithAlivebooks.com)
(<http://ecatechist.typepad.com/ecatechist/ebooks-from-faithalivebookscom>)

Janet Schaeffler has gathered together in one volume some essential insights and practices that will help parishes begin and/or deepen the magnitude of adult faith formation ministry. Practical, simple and easy to use. Reflection/discussion questions personalize each tip.

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- **Advice and support** for parents, grandparents, families and young adults
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What Our Online Community is Saying:

"It was easy to navigate, easy to register, and easy to access content on the site. That is high praise from a web immigrant. The content was superb."

"I would definitely recommend this site to parents, grandparents and godparents. I think it's intuitive and will be a great resource for families!"





Congregational Vitality and Older Adult Ministries

Richard H. Gentzler Jr.

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by the covering, cast them away as ugly, or heavy or hard. Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendor, woven of love, by wisdom, with power.
Friar Giovanni Giocondo (1433-1515)

This beautiful poem by Friar Giovanni was written in 1513. In addition to being a priest, Friar Giovanni was an architect and, in his later life, he had responsibility for overseeing the erection of the new St. Peter's Basilica and for strengthening its foundation. When he wrote this poem at 80 years of age, he was experiencing aging as something other than decline.

During Giovanni's era, few people lived to old age. Life was hard and often cruel, and people who managed to live a long life were thought to be especially blessed by God and were considered "living saints" in the life of the church. Today, our culture often depicts aging and later life as decline, or as a disease and unnatural. Yet, paradoxically, today there many articles, books, YouTube videos, and nightly news reports illuminating a changing reality of aging in the graying of America. These reports often depict a new aging culture that replaces aging stereotypes with empowering values of independence, activity, well-being, and service. Replacing aging stereotypes and ageist attitudes with empowering values can help transform graying congregations into vital congregations.

Many congregations with large numbers of older people can and do experience congregational vitality. Church leaders in vital congregations know that people of all ages are called to be faithful witnesses of God's love. Older adults, no less than people of other ages, are

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equipped and empowered for ministry. Healthy congregations find creative ways of inviting older adults to remain a vital part of the church by making significant contributions to its ministry.

Here are some suggestions for helping your church in congregational vitality:

1. **Build on your strengths, not your weaknesses.** If you don't have a congregation filled with children, youth, or young adults, assess who you do have. If your church is situated in an area with more retired people than young people, your strength for ministry rests with midlife and older adults. Don't "feel guilty" or "beat yourself up" for not having children or youth. Plan ministry that intentionally engages older adults in faith development and in mission and service. Stay open to ways of reaching children, youth, and young adults, but don't lose sight of your strengths for ministry: older adults.
2. **Form a team.** Identify others who have a passion and a calling for older-adult ministries and form a team. Then begin to identify the needs and talents of older adults in your church and community. Survey the older adults in your congregation and community. Identify their needs and talents and, with your team, develop a shared vision that engages, equips, and empowers older adults for ministry.
3. **Follow your mission statement.** The mission of the church and with older-adult ministries (as with children's ministries, youth ministries, and adult ministries) is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Guide your older adult ministries with the mission of your church firmly implanted in your vision.
4. **Empower lay leadership teams.** Older-adult ministry is not something that is done by a pastor to senior adults or by a volunteer leader for older adults. Rather, it is a ministry by, with, and for older adults. Such a ministry seeks to equip and empower all older adults for ministry. Vital congregations empower lay leadership teams with older adults who provide caregiving ministries, mission and service opportunities, and small-group leadership. Invite lay leadership teams to visit and to take Holy Communion to all homebound and nursing-home residents. Lay leadership teams can help hold one another accountable in growing as Christians and can model spiritual maturity for other older persons.
5. **Use lifestyles, not age, as the determining factor for ministry.** Chronological age is not important in ministry with persons at midlife and beyond. Rather, lifestyle issues are more important. For example, grandparenting concerns are not just for people who are retired. Grandparents are as young as people in their thirties and early forties. The question becomes: "What are the common concerns that all grandparents, of whatever age, may experience?" Create small groups around common interests, concerns, or careers.
6. **Develop various ministry options.** Realize that one ministry type does not meet all the needs of older adults. Some older adults will enjoy meeting together for a weekly or monthly noon luncheon program, while other older adults would rather be part of a mission team or take part in a community service project. Some older adults will be available during the day;

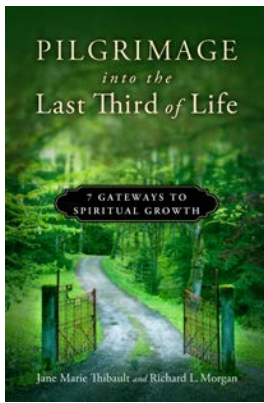
others will be working and available only at night or on weekends. Some older adults will need caregiving services, while others can be care-providers. Some older adults will enjoy singing "old familiar hymns," while others enjoy singing praise songs. Remember: no two older adults are exactly alike; therefore, no single ministry will reach everyone.

7. ***Foster intergenerational ministry and lifelong learning.*** Create opportunities for intentional intergenerational ministry with young people and older adults. Help older adults to become active listeners and faith sharers for young people in your congregation and community. Also find ways that older adults can continue to learn and grow in faith and life. People who age well often have growing relationships with younger people and are involved in learning and growth opportunities. Invite older adults to invest in the lives of young people, as well as investing financially in missions.
8. ***Make your church facilities inviting and accessible.*** Keep in mind the changing needs of people as they age. Restrooms should be accessible,

lighting needs to be bright enough and font sizes large enough for people to be able to read, and acoustics and sound systems should allow all people to be able to hear clearly. Plan Bible study groups to be held during daylight hours, especially in winter months. Create an atmosphere of radical hospitality that is warm, friendly, and inviting for all midlife and older adults.

Since many of us will live longer and healthier lives than previous generations, we have the opportunity to create a second half of life that is fundamentally different from what our parents and grandparents experienced. However, we will also face new challenges and struggles. In reality, we are pioneers, forging new paths and definitions about what it means to be older adults.

Vital congregations will find creative ways of engaging, equipping, and empowering a growing older-adult population. Ministry with older adults should be more than a "maintenance ministry" or a "chapel ministry." Faced with the reality of an aging society, growing congregations will not get bogged down by negative attitudes about aging. Instead, vital congregations will equip older adults to grow as mature Christians and will empower seniors for Christian mission and service.



Book Excerpt: “Go On a Pilgrimage”

Pilgrimage into the Last Third of Life

7 Gateways to Spiritual Growth

Jane Marie Thibault and Richard L. Morgan (Upper Room Books, 2012)

Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage (Gen. 47:8-9, KJV).

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage (Ps. 119:54, KJV).

Many people have adopted the term journey as the metaphor for life in the later years. Webster defines journey as (1.) the act of traveling from one place to another; trip (2.) any course or passage from one stage or experience to another. While these definitions validly describe life from a secular viewpoint, they seem to imply that living the later years is a linear process, without goal, meaning, or intention. The term pilgrimage better describes the life course for the Christ-follower. Wikipedia defines pilgrimage as “a journey or search of great moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person’s beliefs and faith. . . . A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim.” The terms pilgrim and pilgrimage imply a life of meaningful intent and spiritual intensity, a far more vital way of looking at the experience of the last third of life than journey.

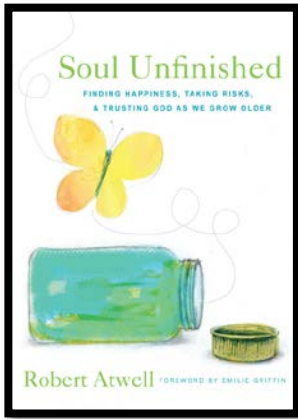
We envision later life not as a random series of events to be endured and adapted to but as an intentional movement toward God. Not just a journey but an intentional, sacred search for our Beloved. When seen in that light, whatever and whomever we encounter each moment of each day becomes an encounter with the holy, an event that can transform us, a signpost pointing the way, leading us to our ultimate leap into God’s embrace at our death. So in the Last Third, death is our sacred destination, not a place to be feared. The gates we discuss represent significant milestones on the path as well as portals through which we must pass to proceed to the next stage of our pilgrimage.

How do we become pilgrims, how do we understand living in our Last Third as the most important pilgrimage of our lives? The decision to

go on a pilgrimage is uniquely our own. If we re-envision aging as a pilgrimage and ourselves as pilgrims, (1) we choose to realize that we no longer have to maintain the illusion that we are young. We don’t even need to use the qualifying euphemism “young at heart.” We discover that what was once appropriate for our 30s, 40s and 50s no longer serves us well in our 60s, 70s, 80s and 90+; in fact what was useful earlier may actually impede our growth in later life. (2) We acknowledge the limited nature of time; every moment brings an opportunity to experience God more fully. (3) We choose to believe that we are not only aging, but we are following a call to advance—to go forth from the known and the comfortable into the unknown and often uncomfortable, perhaps even painful. (4) We choose not to retire from life but to re-fire into new life. (5) We choose to interpret all the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual changes as new territory to traverse in our advancement. (6) We choose to see this as our final pilgrimage—the one that will ultimately lead us to our Beloved, our Source. (7) We are willing and eager to invite others to come with us and to help them along, just as we are willing to allow them to help us reach our sacred destination of heaven.

Reflection

- What have been your metaphors for aging?
- Have you ever been on a pilgrimage? Do you know anyone who has?
- How do you resonate with the interpretation of the Last Third as a pilgrimage?
- In what ways do you envision yourself as a pilgrim?
- Looking back, what allows you to reinterpret your aging experience as a pilgrimage?



Book Excerpt: “Invitation”

Soul Unfinished: Finding Happiness, Taking Risks, & Trusting God as We Grow Older

Robert Atwell (Paraclete Books, 2012)

One of the great things about the twenty-first century is that most of us can expect to live far longer than our grandparents. Modern medical care and good health permit a quality of life vastly superior to what was possible fifty years ago.

Life—at least in the developed world—is now roughly divided into three parts: twenty years of education, forty years of work, followed by twenty or

thirty years of leisure. But are we prepared for the opportunity that this represents?

Far from being a grim affair of shrinking horizons, growing older can be an adventure, full of new and exciting possibilities. With the mortgage paid and the children flown the nest, our time is our own. No longer at anyone’s beck and call, we are free to do what we like. Cheap air flights make travel to remote parts of the world possible. The University of the Third Age offers a range of educational opportunities. Fitness programs encourage us to keep supple and trim. All this is a rare luxury compared with the lot of previous generations, and marks us out still further from those who live in poorer parts of the world. Suddenly there is the chance to do things we always dreamed of. T. S. Eliot’s words beckon us: “Old men ought to be explorers.”

Of course, not everyone is energized by a fresh set of opportunities. The prospect of radical change in the pattern of daily life can generate waves of anxiety. Some find the relentless pace of technological change intimidating. They watch young people quickly master the latest piece of electronic wizardry while they fumble. Others find their confidence undermined by the way in which the values and principles they used to measure success no longer seem to matter to a new generation. Do you fight or capitulate? In a society where losing your looks and growing old is feared it is hard to believe your experience is valued, no matter what the official rhetoric declares. Not surprisingly, many older people feel they no longer have significance.

In some professions age is not a handicap. Lawyers and judges in particular are respected for their accumulated wisdom and experience. Lord Denning, the famous Master of the Rolls, was firing on all cylinders to the end. But they are exceptions

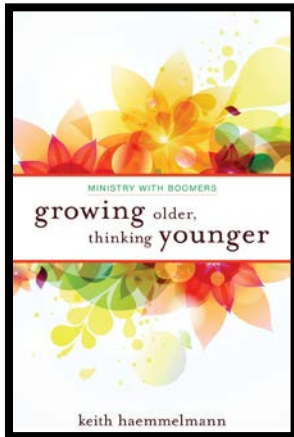
to the rule. The fixation of the media with youth and celebrity has the unfortunate effect of sidelining older people, whose voice is often under-represented.

It would be wrong to blame everything on youth culture or the media, but the fact remains that in the past older people were honored and valued, as they still are in many parts of the world. For example, the Bible describes the ancient Hebrew institution of the elders of a town gathering at its gate to take counsel or resolve a dispute. As one of the psalms lyrically has it, “The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap” (Psalm 92:12–13). It is to our shame that we no longer expect the elderly to produce fruit, let alone be full of sap. But watch out: older people can take the world by surprise.

Mary Wesley did not publish her first novel, *Jumping the Queue*, until she was seventy-one. In 1990, at the age of seventy-two, Nelson Mandela emerged on to the world stage from solitary confinement on Robben Island to become President of the Republic of South Africa. By the sheer force of his personality and integrity, he transformed a nation haunted by years of apartheid into a rainbow coalition of peoples built on mutual respect and forgiveness. In 1958 when the cardinals elected Angelo Roncalli pope, they probably imagined that in choosing an old man of seventy-seven they had a safe candidate who could easily be controlled. In the event, Pope John XXIII turned out to be one of the great reforming popes, determined to throw open the doors of the Church to new ideas. Old men may not only be explorers, they may be revolutionaries.

Book Resources

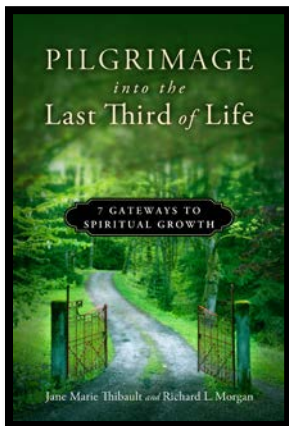
Adult Faith Formation



Growing Older, Thinking Younger

Keith Haemmelmann (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2012)

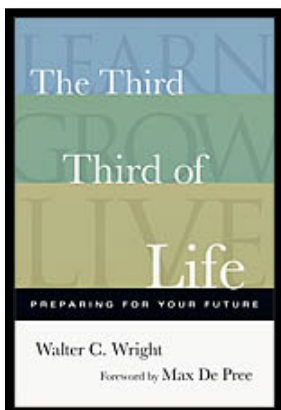
Baby Boomers are maturing, more Boomer than baby, and redefining what it means to age gracefully. *Growing Older, Thinking Younger...Ministry to Boomers* helps church leaders Discover what successful ministry with aging members of your congregation looks like. Readers will learn how the church can reach out to this large segment and adapt to their needs as they move into retirement. Haemmelmann reveals to readers what boomers look like, what is important to them and how church fits into their everyday lives. He illustrates for readers how to propel your ministries with older adults forward as they enter their golden years. Discover examples of proven ministry programs designed for seniors; ideas for embracing older adults through needs-specific ministry; and how to prepare Boomers for retirement.



Pilgrimage into the Last Third of Life

Jane Marie Thibault & Richard L. Morgan (Nashville: Upper Room, 2012)

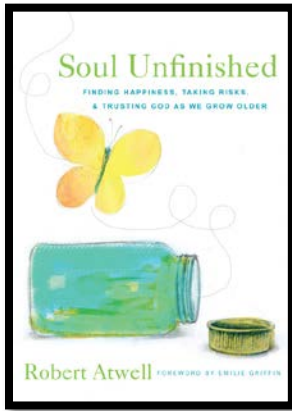
The last third of life doesn't have to be feared. When viewed from a Christian perspective, this season of life can be meaningful, enduring, and even joyful, say authors Jane Thibault and Richard Morgan. They suggest approaching the Last Third as a pilgrimage—a journey full of purpose, ripe with opportunities for spiritual growth. The authors present 7 gateways to spiritual growth: 1) Facing Aging and Dying, 2) Learning to Live with Limitations, 3) Doing Inner Work, 4) Living in and Out of Community, 5) Praying and Contemplation, 6) Redeeming Loss and Suffering, and 7) Leaving a Legacy. This collection of scripture-based meditations includes reflection questions and can be used by individuals or groups for a 7-week study.



The Third Third of Life

Walter C. Wright (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012)

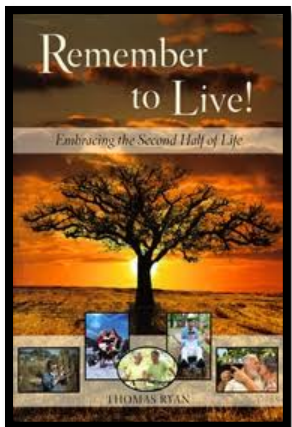
Considering retirement can be daunting. How do you know how to best plan for the future? *The Third Third of Life* is a helpful guidebook to lead you thoughtfully into this new stage of life. Walter C. Wright provides eight sessions to help those moving toward retirement plan out their next steps. Developed and field-tested at the Max De Pree Center for Leadership, this guide includes material for individuals and groups that will enable 50-somethings (and up) to prepare for the next chapter of life with confidence.



Soul Unfinished: Finding Happiness, Taking Risks, & Trusting God as We Grow Older

Robert Atwell (Brewster: Paraclete Books, 2012)

More and more people are living into old age—that's a fact. With careers winding down and children having left home, people are now faced, sometimes for the first time in our lives, with the most basic questions about the meaning of life. What is most important? What is the essence of my life? *Soul Unfinished* offers wise advice for such times, encouraging people, in throughout and practical ways, to make the most of the last quarter of a good life. This book is a spiritual guide for this new stage of life.



Remember to Live: Embracing the Second Half of Life

Thomas Ryan (New York: Paulist Press, 2012)

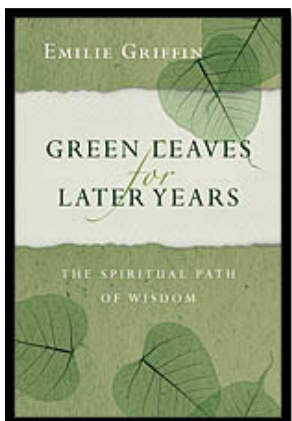
None of us can escape the sober reminders of our finitude: aging, illness, the losses of life, and our own deaths and those of our loved ones. The question is, how do we deal with those reminders? With fear and trepidation? Or with a desire to learn the lessons they have to teach and to thus grow through our encounter with them? Engaging with these themes is an invitation to fuller and deeper living. *Remember to Live!* has been shaped by the reflections, testimony, and experience of retreat participants that the author has led over the past fifteen years. At the end of each chapter are reflection questions, exercises, poems, and prayers to help readers do their inner work.



Souls in Full Sail: A Christian Spirituality for the Later Years

Emilie Griffin (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2011)

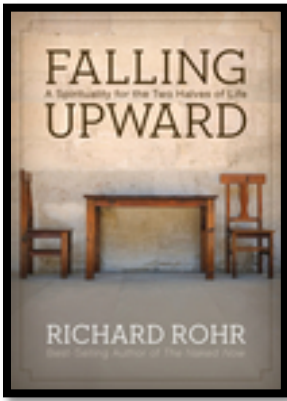
“We do not set out to become old. Far from it. We hardly intend even to become middle-aged. Instead we plan to live in some eternal now which will lead on to something better, something more complete than what we had before. . . . Sometime in our spiritual travels, as a complete surprise, we notice it has become winter.” In *Souls in Full Sail* Emilie Griffin takes us on an exploration of the later adult years in a book filled with wonderful, rich story, carefully crafted spiritual exercises and wisdom from those who have gone before us. Each chapter ends with a spiritual exercise and reflection questions.



Green Leaves for Later Years: The Spiritual Path of Wisdom

Emilie Griffin (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012)

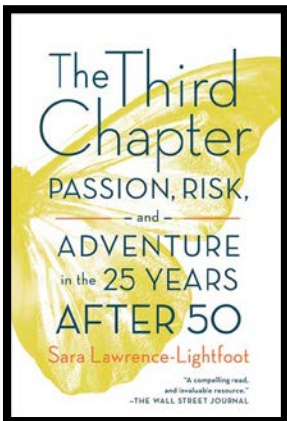
“What wisdom do I bring to the later years? Nothing more than the wisdom of dwelling in the present moment. No more than the courage of God's promises. Nothing more than the courage to walk through sorrow. No more than the unlimited future of God's love.” In *Green Leaves for Later Years* Emilie Griffin reflects on the beauty and the difficulty of aging. Discover a spirituality for the later years and how to draw close to the Lord who longs to guide us through these years. Each chapter ends with reflection questions and a prayer.



Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life

Richard Rohr, OFM. (Jossey-Bass, 2011)

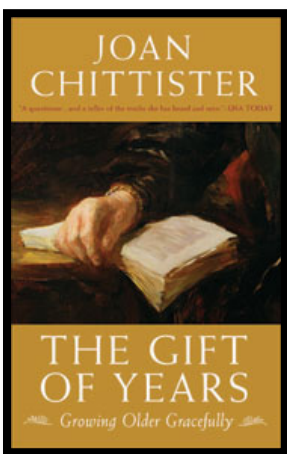
In *Falling Upward*, Fr. Richard Rohr seeks to help readers understand the tasks of the two halves of life and to show them that those who have fallen, failed, or “gone down” are the only ones who understand “up.” Most of us tend to think of the second half of life as largely about getting old, dealing with health issues, and letting go of life, but the whole thesis of this book is exactly the opposite. What looks like falling down can largely be experienced as “falling upward.” In fact, it is not a loss but somehow actually a gain, as we have all seen with elders who have come to their fullness. He explains why the second half of life can and should be full of spiritual richness, and offers a new view of how spiritual growth happens. This important book explores the counterintuitive message that we grow spiritually much more by doing wrong than by doing right.



The Third Chapter: Passion, Risk, and Adventure in the 25 Years After 50

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2009)

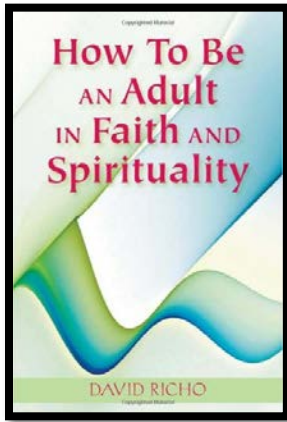
Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot writes, “We must develop a compelling vision of later life: one that does not assume a trajectory of decline after fifty, but one that recognizes it as a time of change, growth, and new learning; a time when ‘our courage gives us hope.’” Whether by choice or not, many in their “third chapters” are finding ways to adapt, explore, and channel their energies, skills, and passions in new ways and into new areas. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot documents and reveals how the years between fifty and seventy-five may, in fact, be the most transformative and generative time in our lives, tracing the ways in which wisdom, experience, and new learning inspire individual growth and cultural transformation. *The Third Chapter* is full of passionate and poignant stories of risk and vulnerability, failure and resilience, challenge and mastery, experimentation and improvisation, and insight and new learning.



The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully

Joan Chittister, O.S.B. (New York: BlueBridge Books, 2008)

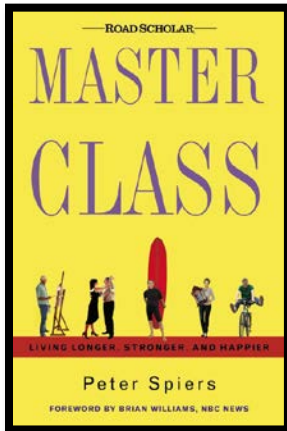
Not only accepting but also celebrating getting old, this inspirational and illuminating work looks at the many facets of the aging process, from purposes and challenges to struggles and surprises. Central throughout is a call to cherish the blessing of aging as a natural part of life that is active, productive, and deeply rewarding. Perhaps the most important dimension revealed lies in the awareness that there is a purpose to aging and intention built into every stage of life. Chittister reflects on many key issues, including the temptation towards isolation, the need to stay involved, the importance of health and well-being, what happens when old relationships end or shift, the fear of tomorrow, and the mystery of forever. Readers are encouraged to surmount their fears of getting older and find beauty in aging well.



How to Be an Adult in Faith and Spirituality

David Richo (New York: Paulist Press, 2011)

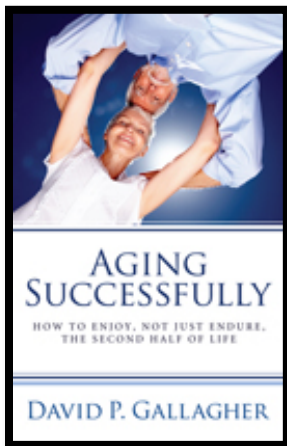
What does a genuinely adult spirituality look like. Many adults find it difficult to answer this question because they often retain a childlike understanding of God and religion. This book explore that phenomenon, and then offers adult alternatives in the light of mysticism, depth psychology, and the evolutionary cosmology. This book describes how a mature faith is nourished by religious views that are open-minded and respectful of individuality. The author offers a path of enriching spiritual growth.



Master Class: Living Longer, Stronger, and Happier

Peter Spiers (New York: Center Street, 2012)

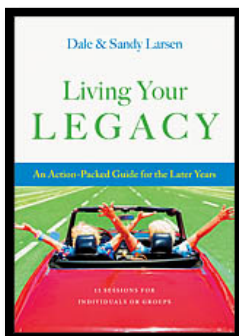
They can be seen in communities throughout the country—those amazingly older folks who are having fun, have a million friends, are sharp as tacks, and look like they'll live forever. Their secret—revealed and explained in *Master Class*—is an active lifestyle that blends moving, thinking, socializing and creating. Through inspirational stories from active seniors, supported by the latest research in the fields of psychology and neuro-science, *Master Class* shows how to build an enriching lifestyle on the foundation of favorite activities. Peter Spiers provides easy-to-follow charts that allow readers to break out of their daily routines into Moving, Thinking, Socializing, Creating; and a list of 25 “Master Activities” to create a rich and meaningful life.



Aging Successfully: How to Enjoy, Not Just Endure, The Second Half of Life

David P. Gallagher (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012)

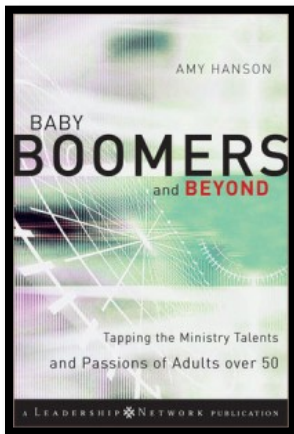
Aging Successfully offers suggestions for greater satisfaction and happiness for people over age fifty. It raises spiritual and emotional issues such as how to deal with depression and gives specific action steps. This book is packed full of practical help; it is a road map for aging, especially during economically challenging days. This practical, easy-to-read book provides wisdom and time-tested counsel for a happy and highly productive second half of life. The author draws from his experience of ten years as senior pastor in an age-restricted community designed to reach people over age fifty.



Living Your Legacy: A Guide for the Later Years

Dale and Sandy Larsen (Downers Grove: IVP Connect, 2012)

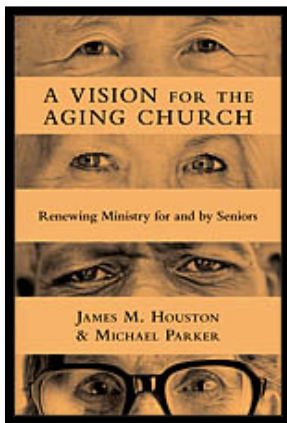
No matter what stage of life we find ourselves in, we may wonder if what we've done with our time on earth bears any significance. But this question becomes especially important when our expectations for lifelong achievement and ability in later years come face to face with a reality that may not meet those lifelong hopes.. This book has 13 sessions of personal narratives, Bible studies, connection points with biblical figures, prayer and exercises designed to help people explore, with God's help, how to live their legacy.



Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passions of Adults over 50

Amy Hanson. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010)

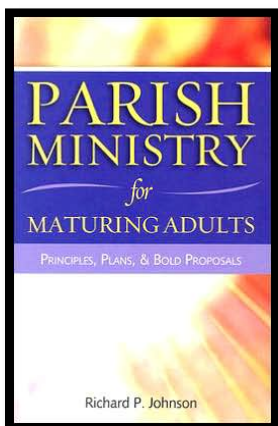
Baby Boomers and Beyond explores the opportunities and challenges that the older adult population presents for the Christian community. Amy Hanson dares church leaders to embrace a new paradigm that older adults are for the most part active, healthy, and capable of making significant contributions for the Kingdom of God. Hanson offers a realistic view of the Boomers and reveals what matters most to this age group: staying young, juggling multiple relationships, and redefining retirement. By tapping into their needs, pastors can engage this burgeoning group and unleash the power of the Boomer generation to enhance and strengthen the mission of the church. The book address questions such as: How do we let go of “one-size-fits-all” ministry? What spiritual growth can we encourage? How do we meld multiple generations? And, most important, how do we harness the potential of this new generation? There are examples from churches across the country.



A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors

James Houston and Michael Parker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011)

Are we ready for the opportunities and challenges facing the aging church? Now is the time for the church to offer ministry to its increasing numbers of seniors and to benefit from ministry they can offer. In this book James M. Houston and Michael Parker issue an urgent call to reconceive the place and part of the elderly and seniors in the local church congregation. Confronting the idea that the aging are mostly a burden on the church, they boldly address the moral issues related to caring for them, provide examples of successful care-giving programs and challenge the church to restore broken connections across the generations. Co-written by a noted theologian and an expert in the fields of social work and gerontology, this interdisciplinary book assesses our current cultural context and the challenges and opportunities we face. The authors show us that seniors aren't the problem. They are the solution.

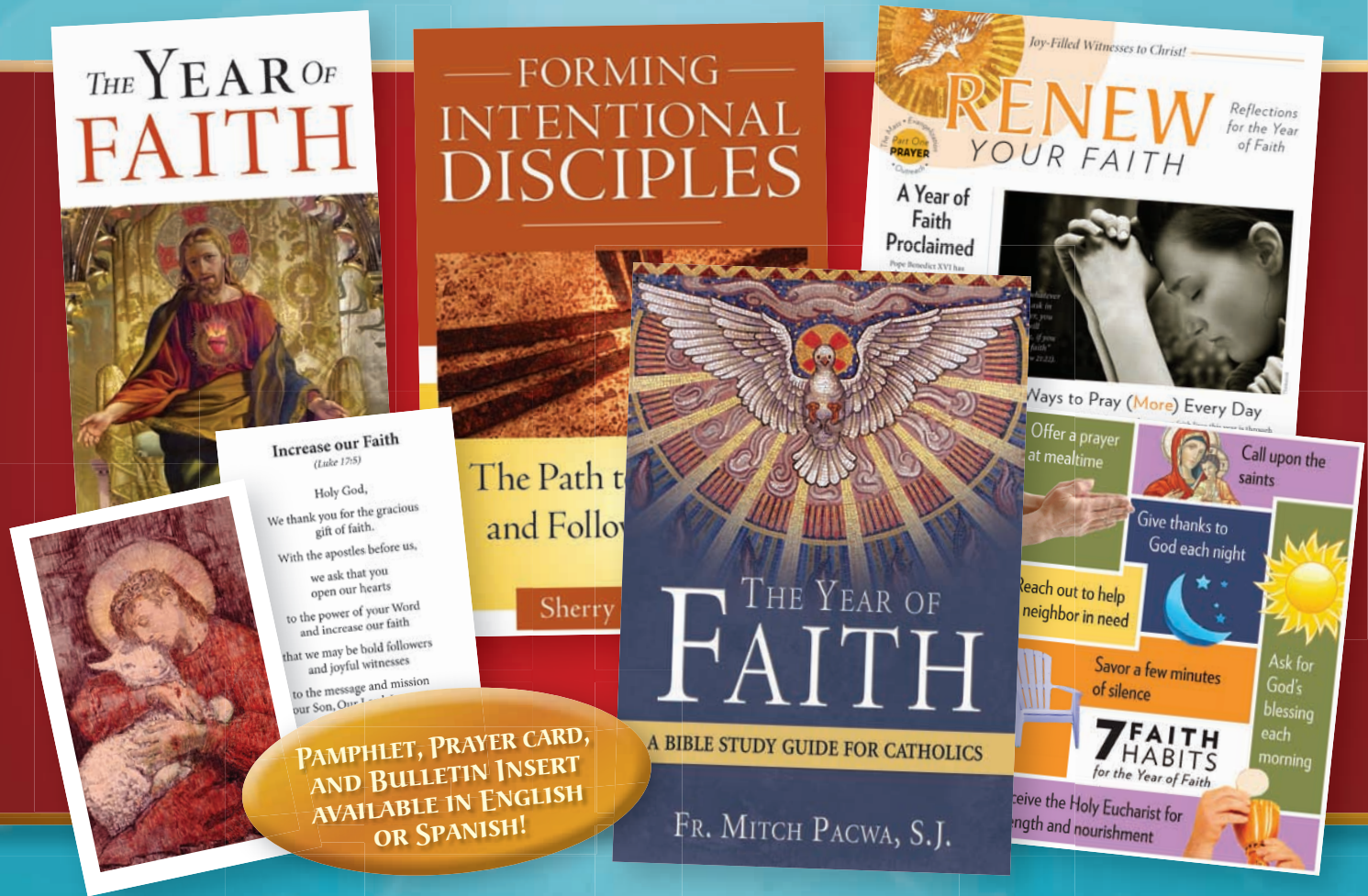


Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: Principles, Plans, & Bold Proposals

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

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

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Organizational Resources Adult Faith Formation



The Christian Association Serving Adult Ministries Network

<http://www.gocasa.org>

CASA provides resources, training tools, and access to a network of pastors, teachers, and professionals in aging who are passionate about ministry to and from adults in life's second half. You'll find articles, interviews and book reviews regarding current research on aging, intergenerational ministry, and other topics in our Resource Center.

Faith Formation Matters

<http://www.janetschaeffler.com>

Janet Schaeffler's website research, ideas, resources and best practices for adult faith formation; and publications and articles on spirituality and faith formation for all ages.

Forum on Religion and Spirituality in Aging

<http://www.asaging.org/forum-religion-spirituality-and-aging-forsa>

The Forum on Religion, Spirituality and Aging constitutes a national, multidisciplinary and nondenominational community of professionals committed to examining and fostering the spiritual dimension of human existence as a central element in the aging process and to fostering an appreciation for the importance of incorporating an awareness of this dimension into all the disciplines that make up the fascinating world of gerontology.

Older Adult Ministries, The Episcopal Church

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/older-adult-ministries>

The Episcopal Church's website provides a variety of practical resources for adult faith formation. Be sure to download the "Aging is Changing" resource.

Older Adult Ministries, General Board of Discipleship

http://www.gbod.org/site/c.nhLRJ2PMKsG/b.3784737/k.7977/Older_Adult_Ministries.htm

The Center on Aging & Older Adult Ministries provides quality resources and training to help equip leaders (both clergy and laity) in their ministry of faith development with midlife and older adults.

Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network

<http://www.poamn.org>

POAMN is the Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network, a network of persons who are engaged in ministry with older adults. Check out the online resources, especially the annual, digital *Older Adult Ministries Planning Guide*.

Senior Adult Ministry

<http://www.senioradultministry.com>

The goal of author and instructor Richard Johnson's organization and website, Senior Adult Ministry, is to bring excellence to ministry for Christians in the second half of life. You will find training programs, DVDs, self-assessment tools, and books on the website.