



Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

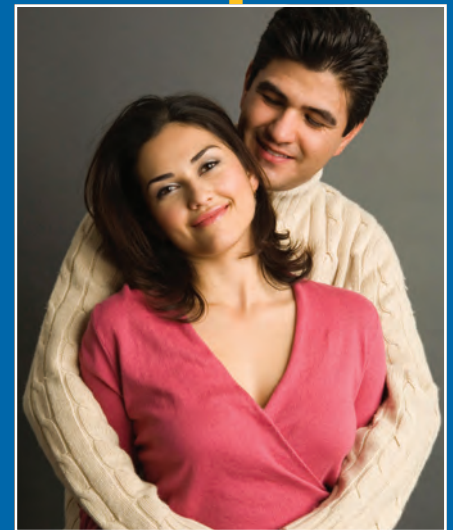
Volume 8.1

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Fall 2014



Faith Formation
Practices &
Approaches for
All Ages &
Generations



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the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

Fall 2014 – Volume 8.1 ***Faith Formation Practices & Approaches***

John Roberto, Editor

- 2 Building Blocks of Faith
Laura Keeley and Robert J. Keeley
- 13 Children’s Faith Formation at Church and Home: Birth to Age 5
Jolene Roehlkepartain
- 18 The “Identity Crisis” of the Youth Minister
Lee Yates
- 23 Responding to the Diversity of Today’s Adults
Janet Schaeffler
- 30 Milestones Ministry: An Effective Model for Lifelong Faith Formation
Debbie Streicher
- 35 The Intergenerational Top Seven: What You Must Know and Do to Be Successful at Intergenerational Ministry
Jim Merhaut
- 41 Digital Media for Ministry Brief: Communications and Evangelism
Kyle Matthew Oliver
- 48 Story and Christian Formation: Using Movies, Video, and Music
Shannon Kelly
- 53 Down from the Mountaintop: Sustaining the Church Camp Experience at Home
Marlene Bogard

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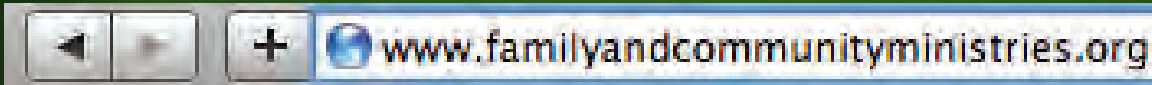


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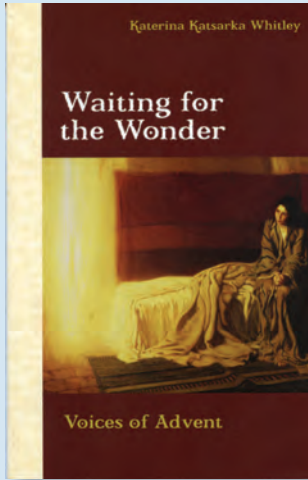
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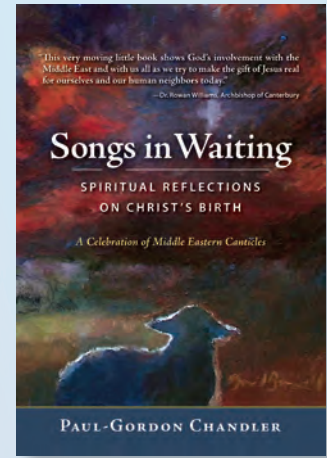
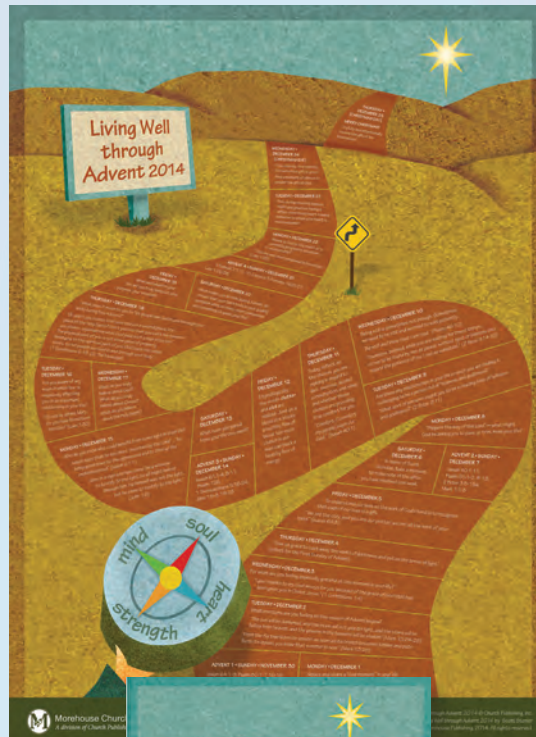


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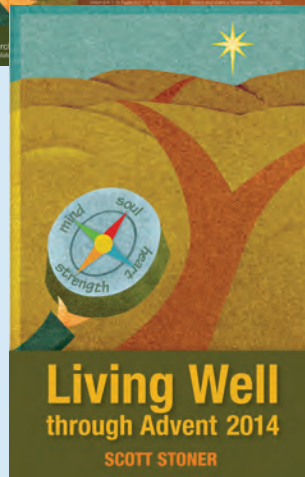
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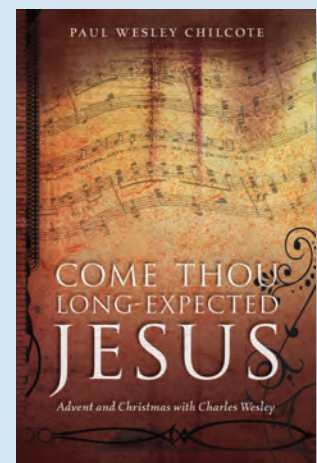
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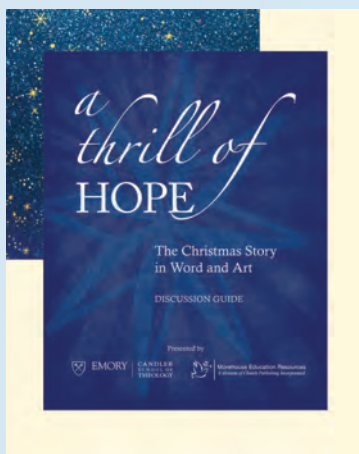
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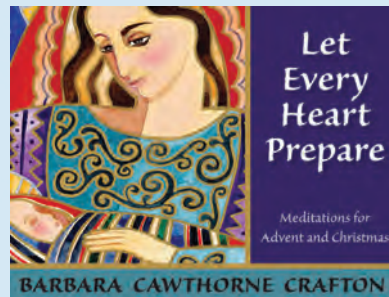
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Building Blocks of Faith

Laura Keeley & Robert J. Keeley

We were standing in the fellowship room at church one Sunday after morning worship when we heard a scream. It was Sondra. She was engaged in a full-blown tantrum. She was not happy with her mother and didn't care who knew it. Sondra is eleven years old and has had many things to overcome in her life. Sondra and her mom have been coming to our church fairly regularly for a couple of years. Sondra lives with Katie and Paul, parents of a family from our church, because her mother, who was raising her alone, wasn't really able to take care of her. Sondra stays with her mom on Sundays and this Sunday she was being difficult so her mom told her she needed to go home with Katie and Paul for the rest of the day. Sondra didn't like that one bit. Perhaps she thought that if she made enough of a scene either her mom or Katie or Paul would give in but that didn't happen.

On a day like this one wonders if there is much hope for Sondra. She's already been through a lot and she hasn't even hit the teenage years yet. But we have seen Sondra's faith develop over the time she has been with us. She professed her faith and asked to be baptized. Sondra, like all of us, is a work in progress. God is working in her and we, her church family, have offered ourselves to God to work in her life. So, what do we do to help Sondra grow in faith? What is needed for Sondra's faith to continue to grow?

Laura Keeley is a Faith Formation Coach for congregations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. **Robert J. Keeley** is Professor of Education at Calvin College and Director of Distance Learning at Calvin Theological Seminary, both in Grand Rapids, MI. Together they also serve as the Directors of Children Ministries at 14th Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, MI. They have, together and separately, written a number of books, articles, Christmas plays and curricula including *Celebrating the Milestones of Faith* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2009), *The Church Staff Handbook* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2014), *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* (Baker, 2008).

Much of the recent writing about faith describes faith and how it changes or develops as a person ages. The faith stages developed by James Fowler and John Westerhoff are helpful in understanding what faith is like for people of different ages but they are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. That is, they tell us what people are like, not what to do to create change or growth. These theories are used as a starting point and the writers quickly move on to application. They do not usually give a clear set of marching orders for people designing programs for faith formation in churches. The answer to the simple question “What do people need in order to grow in faith?” is often not addressed.

Professionals who work with faith development theories often specialize in one of the age groups such as children, teens, or adults. What is recommended often doesn't relate to people working with other age groups. In addition, the vocabulary for different age groups is different. People working with adults use words such as “spiritual transformation” and “discipleship” while people working with children use the terms “faith nurture” and “spiritual development.” Some authors who focus only on adults seem to do their work without regard to the developmental work done in the area of faith formation. Some of adult faith stages are such that any “good” thirty-year-old Christian could expect to be either at the top step (often demonstrating a significant level of commitment to church ministries) or else very close. This begs the question of whether the rest of their lives are merely maintenance of this step. This left us dissatisfied with many of these systems and wishing for a more holistic view of ministry.

Another reason for the reluctance to answer this question “What do we need to help grow faith?” is that we can't give people faith. Faith is mysterious and only God gives us faith. At the same time we also believe that faith formation happens everyday. The Israelites' faith was being formed as they saw the 10 plagues, as they packed up and left Egypt, as they walked through the Red Sea and

as they heard the law at Mt. Sinai. The question isn't “Are we being formed?” The question is “How are we being formed?”¹

In the New Testament, Paul writes to Timothy “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy learned about faith from the people around him. In the same way, we, too, are being formed by the things we see, do and hear and by important people in our lives. Therefore it makes good sense to be thoughtful and deliberate in what we do to support faith formation at all ages.

In *Real Kids, Real Faith*, Karen Marie Yust distinguishes between faith and faithfulness. Faith, she suggests, is a gift from God. Our part is to develop faithfulness in ourselves and in those around us. This shows up in scripture when God made a covenant with Abraham. He blessed Abraham and his descendants so that through them all the people of the earth would be blessed. Similarly, God has given us a role in the faith formation and the nurture of the people in our lives. God uses people, imperfect people like us, to play an important role in the life of faith for those around us.

Since our faith continues to be formed throughout our whole life, faith formation is not just for children and teens. It is for Christians from cradle to grave. This was in our minds when we were asked, “What do people need?” We began our work, as have many others, by merely looking at one age group, in our case, children. Then we noticed themes in the literature on faith development repeated for many ages. We believe that our identities as people of faith of all ages are shaped by building on the framework of these four themes that we call ***Building Blocks of Faith***: 1) I belong; 2) I understand; 3) I have hope; and 4) I am called and equipped.²

Kenda Creasy Dean, in *Almost Christian*, points to four theological accents that teens who belong to faith communities have: a creed to believe (God's story), a community to belong to, a call to live out, and a hope to hold onto (42). Yust presents six themes related to

children's spirituality: belonging, thanksgiving, giftedness, hospitality, understanding and hope (19). While Yust wrote about children and Dean's research is focused on teens, we suggest that our four building blocks are not restricted to any one age or faith stage but that, while different ages and stages will manifest these needs in different ways, the needs are, nonetheless, universal. We believe that these four building blocks of faith are things that everyone, in every age, needs for their faith to grow.

These four building blocks can help us as we think about Sondra but they can also help us as we think about her caretakers, Katie and Paul as well as Sondra's mom. We can think about how these building blocks relate to retirees and teens, parents of young children and their children, to single people and the newly married. Addressing these four things for Sondra will likely look different from the ministry to a grandparent but these building blocks of faith give us a framework to look at how we are meeting ministry needs for all ages.

I Belong.

The Heidelberg Catechism begins with the question: "What is your only comfort in life and death?" The response is "That I am not my own but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."³ In many Reformed churches this question and answer are memorized by teens in catechism and Sunday school classes. It has become dear to many who studied and learned it, using it in funerals as a source of comfort or weddings as a source of joy and reassurance. One man in our church has a tattoo of the question and answer on his arm, stating that it is the one statement he wants engraved on his body. Having these words tattooed on his arm brings the confession into everyday conversation. One day he visited with an elderly member of our church who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. She touched his arm as he began to recite the question and answer and,

much to his surprise, she started saying it along with him. She had internalized it to the point where, while she was unable to say much, this answer remained in her heart and on her lips.

This notion of belonging, body and soul, in life and in death to Jesus is at the heart of what we want as people. Abraham Maslov places belonging as one of the basics in his Hierarchy of Needs.⁴ When we think about the development of a child one of the first things a child needs is to feel safe and loved. Erikson's first stage of psychosocial development is trust vs. mistrust⁵, a statement of feeling safe and of belonging. Belonging takes on many different forms and has many layers. In our walk of faith knowing that we belong to God is important. But, as people, we are also hardwired for connections to other people.⁶ These connections can be as close as spouse, parents and children and as broad as friendships with colleagues and co-workers and our church community.

As our church was making plans for a new building project we gathered input from as many members as we could. One woman in her late sixties, Lisa, spoke about the senior citizens, stating "everything" in our church was for children and teens. Lisa asked, "When are we going to start doing things for the old people?" At the time, we thought her comment to be rather selfish. She and her husband and many of their friends were perfectly capable of running events for the seniors such as bus trips or Sunday evening fellowship. Children can't take care of themselves but these old people certainly can. Why was she making such a fuss about this?

What we now think is that perhaps this really wasn't about Lisa not being able to do the work but that this was about her not feeling like she belonged. By focusing so much of our attention on children, Lisa felt left out. That basic sense of belonging was not there like it ought to have been. It was a mistake to allow our ministries to leave her, and perhaps others of her age, feeling that way.

Congregations should consider how they help the all the people in their community feel

like they belong. Baptism, for example, whether you belong to a tradition that practices infant or believer baptism, is a wonderful sign of belonging to God. Our identity is found in our baptism. It tells us that we belong to God and belong to the church. Remembering our baptism in worship is one way to reinforce that sense of belonging. It is important to preach the gospel of belonging from our pulpits but we also need to make it concrete.

It is not enough to be told that we belong. We need to feel it. The meeting at which Lisa spoke eventually turned into a building project for our church. We have some wonderful new classrooms, new office space and a remodeling of our former space. The rooms are beautiful. However, after a year of construction, when we were finally able to occupy the space, the children couldn't figure out where their space was. They felt that the new rooms were all for adults. One way a few boys tried to make the place theirs was by bringing flashlights to church so that after worship they could explore the basement in the dark. While that wasn't something that we were excited about allowing (liability issues made that a bit tricky) these boys needed to know that they belonged. They didn't have a sense that this church was still theirs. They weren't sure they belonged. We brought out four Jenga games and a checkerboard and placed them on the beautiful coffee tables in our fellowship hall. The kids stopped trying to explore the basement and began playing checkers and building towers with the Jenga blocks. Our new space had become their space. They had a place to belong. It was a simple solution that meant a lot to them and to their parents.

I Understand/Know.

Judges 2 serves as an introduction to much of what happens throughout the entire book. We read about how God's people had forgotten about God. They had been rescued from Egypt. They had crossed of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, they had seen when the walls of

Jericho fall and when the people took the land of Canaan. Yet, when Joshua died, the people didn't tell the story to their children.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. (Judges 2:10-12)

The story of God's faithfulness to his people is one we need to know. Our faith cannot be merely based on a warm feeling that God loves us (which he does) or that God wants us to live upright lives (which he also does.) Our faith is fairly simple; the Creator of the Universe wants to restore the fellowship that we lost when we sinned. But it is also much more than that. The relationships that are most important to us (spouse, sibling, parent/child or close friend) are all based on knowing the other person. It is through that personal knowledge that our commitment to that person gets deepened. Our son recently got married and our commitment and love for our new daughter-in-law, Melissa, is there simply because our son chose her. However, as we get to know her, as we get to find out more about her and about what makes her laugh and what she enjoys doing, as we learn more and more about who she is that commitment and love are strengthened. Our initial commitment was to the *idea* of a daughter-in-law. As we spent time with Melissa that commitment became to her *as a person*.

Without the content of the stories of God and his people we end up with a weak and incomplete picture of our faith. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton introduced the idea of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to describe the faith that many teens express. They suggest that many young people have the following idea of what their faith is like:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die. (Smith and Denton, 162-163)

We need to know actual content so that our faith is not just based on emotions. God is not primarily interested in us feeling good. Our faith is not just about learning to be good. Faith and behavior are both important but they are not the same.⁷ By concentrating on our behavior, by serving a steady diet of “current issues” to teens and adults, we reinforce the notion that God primarily cares about how we behave. We don't actually build a closer relationship with him. It would be like if all our interactions with our daughter-in-law were simply hearing songs about how much our son loves her.

We need to know God, not just how we should behave. We need to hear the stories of the Old and New Testaments. We need to poetry of the Psalms and the wisdom of Job. We need the guidance and theological instruction of the epistles and the rich, multifaceted history of God's people from the books of Acts and I and II Kings. We also need to know the stories of people like us who have failed and been forgiven, who have succeeded and rejoiced, and who have walked faithfully with God. Our faith is built on a solid rock and we, as God's people, need to be able to recognize that rock. If we don't know the story of God's people found in God's word then we will be just like the people in the book of Judges, the ones who know neither the Lord nor what he did for us.

The Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that Smith and Denton found and that is so rampant in teens (and, frankly, in many

adults) could be the result of a distinct lack of knowledge of scripture, or at least a lack of a well-grounded understanding of how to study scripture. For many teens and even many adults, scripture is taken in small doses. Bible verses are doled out in snippets to encourage us or to chastise us. Bible verses are used as hammers to smack down people who don't agree with us without considering the context of the verses. The Bible becomes little more than platitudes and rules. The people we read about become heroes or villains, someone to act like or someone to avoid.

The Bible is a rich and wonderful story of how God's people continue to reject him and how God chases after them, much like Hosea chased after Gomer. It is a story of exile and restoration, of how God brought his people back from Egypt and back from Babylon and back from their exile from the Garden of Eden through his Son, Jesus. It is in studying the richness of these texts that we begin to get a glimpse of the fullness of God's grace. Our adults and our children need a robust knowledge of scripture, not so that we know how to behave but to know who we are and who the God is whom we love and serve.

I Have Hope.

It was two days after Jesus had been crucified. As the two travelers on the Road to Emmaus began their journey they were in a dark place. They had been in Jerusalem when Jesus was killed and they were shocked and stunned. Jesus was their hope to redeem Israel. They had been suffering under Roman rule for their entire lives and Jesus, who they thought was the promised Messiah, had arrived and rekindled the dormant hope that was in all of God's people, the promise that one would come to restore the kingdom of Israel. But now, Jesus was dead and their hope died along with him.

So they found themselves heading back to their home on the road to Emmaus. Then Jesus, who they did not recognize, came and walked beside them. This was not one or two

minutes. They walked together for seven miles. Jesus explained all that the scriptures had said about him. They listened and were amazed at his teaching. When they arrived at their home they urged him to share a meal with them and it wasn't until Jesus broke bread that the travelers recognized him as their Lord. Then he disappeared from their sight. As they looked back at what had happened to them that day it began to make sense. They realized that their hearts were burning as he taught them about the scriptures and about his place in them. Their hope had returned. They immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem—another seven-mile walk—to tell the disciples what had happened.

Hope is a difficult concept in our modern era. Society defines hope in casual terms. It is something that we desire but have no real assurance of it. I hope my team wins. I hope they get here soon. I hope I get the job offer. It is the slightly more adult version of "wish." Contemporary ideas of hope have no confidence, much like we have no confidence in the outcome of the roll of a die. Christian hope, though, is much more than that. It is an expectation that is strong and confident (Keathley). This is no random wish or shallow desire. This is the hope that lives in knowing that our expectation is based in the promises of the Creator of the Universe. Our hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

The book of Psalms demonstrates this assurance of hope, even in the midst of troubles. One third of the Psalms are laments, expressions of sadness, disappointment and grief. In all but one of the laments, though, the writer makes an interesting turn from expressions of despair to a place of hope. The Psalmist is not afraid to express his feelings and fears. He is also not afraid to express his trust in the Lord, his confidence that God continues to care for him and his sense of hope.

Psalm 13 is a short but powerful example of this. The writer begins with "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" (vs. 1) He then goes on to catalog his woes and demand

that God answer him. "Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death." (vs. 3) But, even in his sadness he remembers that he belongs to the Lord. "But I trust in your unfailing love," he writes. "My heart rejoices in your salvation." (vs. 5) He does not merely express a wish that God will listen to him. He does not question whether God will continue to love him. He is sure of it. That is hope.

Psalm 71:4-5 gives us another insight into biblical hope: "Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel. For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth." Hope is the "confident expectation that what God has promised in the Word is true." (Keathley)

Just like the travelers on the road to Emmaus, there are times when we only see a small part of the big picture. In the daily-ness of life people get involved in their own struggles, disappointments, joys and celebrations. We end up looking at only our own situation without opening ourselves up to the promises of God. Our hope is not just about us. It is much bigger than that. God has said that he will make *all* things new. He is at work in the world and we are his agents. Our hope gives our lives meaning because he has enlisted us in this great work that he is doing. Our sin makes us part of the problem but our willingness to be used by God makes us part of the solution.

God told Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3) Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing to the other nations. As it was with Abraham it is also with us. God has blessed us to be a blessing to the world. We not only have confidence that God will make all things new but we have confidence that he is using us to do it.

Our hope is manifested by listening to others tell the story of God's work in their lives

and by serving others. We do not have to experience a miracle in order to see God's renewing work in the world. We can see it in the work of God's people. Fred Rogers, creator of children's television programming and also ordained as a Presbyterian pastor, saw this in times of sadness. He used this notion to comfort children who were scared by events in the news. He often told a story about when he was a boy and would see scary things on the news: "My mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"⁸ Rogers knew that God's people were doing their work in the world bringing hope and blessing others. By God's grace, those who don't know God can also be helpers. But make no mistake, they are doing God's work, whether they realize it or not.

Whether our work in building God's kingdom is part of our vocation, volunteer work, or a special project, we see God's hand at work in the world when we, and others, are his hands. Being part of one small change in the world helps us see that God will make all things new. Our actions show and reinforce the hope we have.

I Am Called and Equipped.

Like many parents, we saved some of the artifacts of our children's lives. We have programs from concerts or plays that they were in, pictures of soccer teams and orchestras, pages that our children colored at various ages, stories that they have written and lots of art. All of these are stored in books and boxes. A particular favorite is a picture drawn by our oldest daughter when she was about six years old and her favorite Bible story was Esther. In this particular drawing Esther's arm is outstretched, pointing at Haman with the words "That vile Haman!" in a word bubble above her. Haman is so shocked at the accusation that he drops the apple he is holding and there is a "bonk" next to the apple as it hits the floor to make sure we got the point. Aside from the picture we, as a family, have referenced the story of Esther quite often,

using another line from this story. When Esther is deciding whether to help her people or not, Mordacai says, "perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). It turns out that this is a handy line for parents to use in a variety of circumstances. If a child does not want to bring out the garbage or cut the grass or pick up toys you can say, "perhaps you have come to this royal position for such a time as this."

We have fun with that but that line is also a great reminder: God has a special call for each of us. God has placed us in a particular place at a particular time with particular gifts for a purpose. We have been called to that purpose. But more than that, we have also been equipped for that purpose. The Bible offers multiple examples. God called Moses. God talked to him through a burning bush and told him to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses had been equipped to meet the Pharaoh. He had been raised as a member of the royal family. He knew Egypt. He knew the Pharaoh. He knew how the Pharaoh lived and what was important to him. Moses was not only called to do this work, he was uniquely positioned to do it in a way that others could not.

Our call (or calls – we are seldom called to only one thing in our lives) may not be as dramatic as in the stories of Esther or Moses, but they are calls nonetheless. Because *we belong*, because *we know* who God is and who we are in relationship to him, and because *we have hope* that we are part of God's plan for renewing all things, we believe that we have a particular call. To go with this call, God has equipped us in particular ways. Esther pleased the king and developed a relationship with him so that, when she was called to speak to him with regard to the king's plan to kill the Jews, she was able to do so with some authority and was able to speak in a voice that the king was willing to hear.

Discerning exactly what our call is can sometimes be a long process but it is not necessarily a mysterious one. God does not hide our calls from us, at least not long term. Moses heard his call directly from God at the burning bush. Most of us don't hear our call

from God's mouth so directly. Esther's call became clear when Mordacai spoke with her. He nudged her to accept her call. Sometimes our call comes in the voice of others.

Bob first heard about a position at a local seminary when someone working there contacted him about it. He thought that he didn't have the time to do that work on top of his other work. A day later, though, another person from the seminary contacted him about the same position. At that point, Bob thought that he should consider the position more carefully. Perhaps God is using these people in his life to nudge him to treat this opportunity more seriously.

Sometimes the call comes from a combination of our heart's desire and our equipping. We have the opportunity to talk with a number of college students, some of whom seem to have a clear vision of where they are called. They have always, for example, loved math and they have loved teaching math to others. They feel that God is calling them to a career as a math teacher. No one told them to do that, although occasionally they have had adults tell them that they see that they have gifts in certain areas. This very clear sense of call came from listening to their heart and being open to God's guidance.

Sometimes our call comes to us through doors being closed to us. Hearing "no" about certain opportunities drives us to seek other avenues to serve or to earn a living. Bethany was a college junior who had lots of gifts and a couple of avenues that she was exploring for her career. One possible area was heading to seminary and to parish ministry. So she applied for a fellowship at her Christian college that was designed for people who were considering ministry. She got turned down for fellowship and, although she was disappointed, she used that opportunity to apply for a fellowship to work with a Communication professor doing research. She got that fellowship and now, ten years later, is herself a communication professor at a Christian college feeling very much that she has been called to that particular place and to those particular students, at this point in her

life. Being turned down for the ministry fellowship was a nudge that put her on a different path, one that she feels, on reflection, fits her gifts much better than parish ministry would have.

So, this final building block takes the global aspect of hope and makes it personal. God has a task for us as a community but also as individuals. My call is not your call. My gifts are not your gifts. My equipping is not your equipping. But we are all called, gifted and equipped and God has given us this unique combination to serve in his kingdom.

Using Building Blocks to Assess and Develop Church Ministries

By using these four building blocks, congregations can support people in each of these four areas. The chart (at the end of the article) shows a row for each of the four building blocks and columns representing age groups of the people in a typical congregation. We have divided a congregation into five age groups: Children, Teens, Young Adults, Middle Adults and Senior Adults. "Children" refers to infancy through Grade 6, about 12 years old. Notice that the differences within this group can be almost as great as those between groups. A four-year-old and a twelve-year-old are quite different. The same is true in other groups. We could easily have made ten or fifteen age groups but that would quickly get unwieldy so, for the purpose of evaluation, we will only use five groups.

The second group is Teens, which, for our purposes, includes all students in middle and high school. We split the adults into three groups, Young, Middle and Senior. Much has been written about extended adolescence and the age group that many twenty-somethings find themselves in. This is our Young Adult group. This group represents those who are either in college, have joined the workforce but have not yet left home, married, had children, finished school, and found a career.⁹

Middle Adults are people thirty to sixty years old who find themselves in mid-career or in the middle of raising a family. Finally, we recognize the people in Senior Adulthood, people who are sixty years old or older. All five groups need to feel like they belong, they need to know and understand their faith, they need to have hope and they need to experience their sense of call and of being equipped.

Fill in the chart (at the end of the article) with your congregation's ministries. Reflect on questions such as:

- ◆ How does an adult experience belonging in church?
- ◆ What programs are there for helping older adults continue to learn about their faith?
- ◆ How do teens know that they have hope in Christ?
- ◆ How do children know that they are called?

After you have filled in the chart, look at the boxes that are filled. Some of the boxes may have many things in them. Rejoice and celebrate how the Lord has blessed this ministry. These are the ministries that you do well or are particularly important to your congregation. Think about why they are so important to you or why they are so well represented in this table.

Then look at the boxes that are less full or empty. These are areas that perhaps need some attention. Are there ways that you can build on your strengths to focus on these needs in your congregation?

When filling in the chart for our church we noticed a couple of things. First of all, we placed worship in the "hope" row for all the age groups. That caused us to ask if that was really true. Does our worship services really communicate hope? Does it communicate hope for all ages? If that is, indeed, an important part of what we do in worship, then we have a renewed need to make sure our worship is accessible to children as well as teens and adults. Second, a nearly empty cell in the "belong" row for young adults forced us

to ask hard questions about what we are doing to make sure that this age group is included in the life of the church.

This chart is particularly helpful for churches at two levels. First of all, it can be used to evaluate programs. When you are considering the different programs that your church offers it might be helpful to think about where that program fits in this table. Service projects, for example, not only help those outside of your congregation but they also bring hope to those who go on the project and serve members as they see that they are called and equipped to certain types of work. If you see a cell of the table that is blank you should be asking if that, indeed, represents a gap in your ministries or if there are people in your congregation who are being systematically excluded.

This table can also be used to consider ministry to individuals. In our congregation, the members are divided into six household groups and an elder is assigned to each household to care specifically for those people. Elders can write the names of people in their household on the horizontal axis instead of age groups. Then they could fill in the table and ask, "How are the people in my care served by our church programs?" If the only program in your church that helps a person feel like they belong, for example, is one that they are not connected to, ask why they aren't. Is there something in the way the program is structured that makes it difficult for them to participate? Does your congregation need additional ways to bring that sense of belonging to all members? Do you need to change the way your programs are run to serve more people?

As you look at your church, don't forget the informal programs that might serve many of these purposes. In our church, a small prayer group meets very early in the morning each week. This is an important program in our church but it, like most informal programs, can leave some people out. Because it is not a formal program of the church, the meetings are not announced to the congregation. Since it meets at the home of

one of the members, some people might be reluctant to attend. This may be an opportunity to build a similar group that would meet in such a way as to include those who might be disenfranchised with the way the other group is set up.

The building blocks can also be used by other leaders in the church. A Sunday school teacher can look at her students and evaluate if all four building block needs are being met for the students in her class. Does everyone feel welcome and like they belong? Does the time spent in class actually increase our knowledge of God and of the scriptures? How is hope made manifest in our classroom? Are my students hearing God's call? Do they feel equipped to answer that call?

Looking at our church ministries through the lens of faith building blocks enables us to consider the needs of all the members of our congregation and design opportunities to meet their needs so that faith flourishes. Building blocks also recognize that people of all ages have similar needs and that people in different places in their life journey have their needs met in different ways. Building faith is the foundation for all the ministries in our church and by examining what we need to grow faith we equip ourselves and all those in our church to better serve God, our local community, and the world.

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- ² We found *Real Kids, Real Faith* by Karen-Marie Yust and *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* by Kenda Creasy Dean, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 to be especially helpful in our reading.
- ³ The Heidelberg Catechism can be found at <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>
- ⁴ Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs can be found in a number of resources, including *Educational Psychology* 12th edition by Anita Woolfolk, Boston: Pearson, 2013, 434-35.
- ⁵ Erikson's theory can also be found on page 88 in Woolfolk's *Educational Psychology*.
- ⁶ Commission for Children at Risk. *Hardwired to Connect: the New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*. New York: Institute for American Values, 2003.
- ⁷ This idea is expanded in Chapter 6 of *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith: How the Church Can Nurture the Spiritual Development of Kids* by Robert J. Keeley, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- ⁸ "Helping Children With Scary News." *PBS Parents*. PBS, 2005. Web. 6 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.pbs.org/parents/rogers/special/scarynews-thoughts.html>>
- ⁹ These five milestones are noted in *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* by Michael S. Kimmel, New York: Harper, 2008 as markers that indicate the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Building Blocks of Faith

	Children	Teens	Young Adults	Middle Adults	Elders Seniors
I Belong					
I Know / Understand					
I Have Hope					
I Am Called and Equipped					



Children’s Faith Formation at Church & Home: Birth to Age 5

Jolene Roehlkepartain

Too often we focus our children’s faith formation solely within the church since that’s where we have the most control and impact. We can offer a welcoming, warm nursery. We can provide religious classes for young children. We can organize family ministry projects and programs for families with young children.

Yet, we’re missing most of our influence on children’s faith formation when we focus our efforts only within the church. It’s when we create a faith formation strategy for children that includes what happens in the church and in the home that we have the most impact in the short term and the long term.

The Search Institute studied what is most likely to predict the faith maturity of a young person by surveying more than 11,000 individuals in 561 randomly chosen congregations. Search Institute researchers identified two strong factors that predicted the faith maturity of young people: family religiousness and Christian education involvement (Search Institute, 39).

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Too often, we assume that we have no influence over family religiousness. We're grateful to see the religious families that we have, and too often, we wish we had more of these families. Yet, we can help all families deepen their faith, which benefits not only the children but every family member as well.

Encouraging Family Religiousness

What does it mean for a family to be religious? Researchers identified three key factors: talking to family members about faith or God, having family devotions, and doing family projects to help others (Search Institute, 46). The Vibrant Faith at Home website expanded this list even further, providing easy-to-do, faith-formation activities for families with young children in six areas (go to the website at: <http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org>):

- ◆ Caring conversations
- ◆ Ritual and tradition
- ◆ Prayer
- ◆ Bible story
- ◆ Serving others
- ◆ Learning about faith

Families that are religious are comfortable doing these types of activities. Families that are not religious (which often can be a large group of families) are not. So the key is to make it easy for all families to do religious activities that don't stretch them too far out of their comfort zone.

Parents often bring their young children to church with the goal that the church will do all the faith formation work for their children. "Church school is considered to be the primary context for children, youth, and adults to learn the content of the faith tradition and to make connections between content and living the life of a Christian in the world," writes Elizabeth Caldwell (327). One of the barriers we need to overcome in children's faith formation is the idea that this formation

happens only at church. In children's ministry, we can help parents see that they have a lot to offer and that they don't need to be "faith experts" to do so.

1. Helping Families to Talk about Faith

Which family member tends to be most comfortable talking about faith? Mom (Search Institute, 46). We need to help all the adults become more at ease with talking about faith issues. That includes not only Dad but also other adult relatives in the family. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members can have a big impact on a child's faith formation.

Too often parents think they don't have the knowledge or resources to talk about faith, especially when they compare themselves to church leaders and clergy. We need to keep reiterating over and over how church leaders are resources and guides. Adult family members are the ones who make the most impact on a child's faith formation.

"By the way they hold and handle the child, by the guidance, permissions and prohibitions they give, they convey to the child a deep, almost bodily conviction that there is meaning to what they are doing," writes James W. Fowler in *Stages of Faith*. "The child, feeling cherished and included in the parent's meanings, feels an inner sense of trust-worthiness and reliability that can balance the terrors of separation and abandonment" (55).

These everyday interactions and everyday conversations are what help a child grow up well, not only psychologically but spiritually as well. When parents see that the church has influence over their child only a few hours a week compared to parents who are with their children multiple hours each day, parents can begin to realize that they do have a lot to offer.

The trick, however, is to convince parents that they can start talking about faith in easy, comfortable ways. Consider downloading a caring conversation activity from Vibrant Faith at Home once a month to distribute to parents

(<http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org>). Select Caring Conversation in the library and choose activities under the “Young Family” category or have families come to church to try one of the caring conversations when you’re all together and give them another one to take home. Giving parents the opportunity to practice and succeed will often encourage them to keep talking about faith at home.

2. Getting Families to Help Others

Families often feel the most comfortable doing small, short-term, family service projects. Most families feel at ease talking about helping others and why it’s important to do so. A number of churches have monthly family service projects where families can come to church and participate in ways that help others.

Finding projects that are easy and can still have an impact often can be a challenge. Resources such as *Doing Good Together* (Friedman & Roehlkepartain, 51-52, 56) and *Teaching Kids to Care & Share* (Roehlkepartain, 20-21) are packed with lots of easy-to-do service projects that families can do together. The resource, *Doing Good Together*, also includes an entire chapter with projects that families can do on their own.

Vibrant Faith at Home also has free family service projects that you can download to use in your children’s ministry and/or giving to families for them to do at home. Go to the Service activities in the library at <http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org>. Choose activities under the “Young Family” category.

3. Encourage Families to Do Religious Rituals

Some families already do religious rituals. The most common are mealtime prayers. Some also do bedtime prayers. Religious holidays such as Advent, Christmas, and Easter also often have religious rituals that families have adopted from previous generations.

Create ways for families to identify the religious rituals they do and to continue them. Often parents don’t realize that putting out a nativity crèche or Advent candles are important religious rituals. You can provide ways for families to talk about these religious rituals by creating a short talk sheet for them to use at home.

Vibrant Faith at Home also has religious rituals that you can download to give to families to do at home. Go to the Ritual and Tradition section in the library and choose activities under the “Young Family” category. Explore activities under other age groups to see if any can be used or adapted for other aspects of your ministry.

4. Getting Families to Go Deeper

Other important faith practices that families can do at home include prayer, activities to learn about faith, and Bible stories or Bible study. These, however, tend to intimidate families that are new or uncomfortable about faith issues. Think of these practices as ones to help your religious families to go deeper and to get your newer families (eventually) to go deeper into faith formation.

Vibrant Faith at Home has individual, easy-to-do activities in three of these areas: prayer, learning about faith, and Bible stories. Go to <http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org> and look in the Library for activities under these categories: prayer, learning about faith, and Bible stories.

Going Deeper with Your Children’s Ministry

You won’t have much of an impact on families at home, however, if they’re not coming to church. That’s why it’s essential to focus on both aspects of Search Institute’s finding on the two strong factors that impact faith maturity of young people: Christian education involvement and family religiousness (Search Institute, 39).

How do you get families to come to your Christian education activities? By doing Christian education in a way that matters to them. Researchers identified seven key factors of what makes a Christian education program for young people effective ((Search Institute, 56): Teachers, Pastor, Educational Process, Educational Content, Peer Involvement, Parent Involvement, and Goals.

An effective children's ministry program has teachers that are high in a mature faith, care about children, and know education theory and methods (Search Institute, 56). Unfortunately, churches tend to have teachers that have these characteristics working with adults, not children. In fact, researchers found that 55 percent of adult education teachers in churches have a high-faith maturity compared with 40 percent of teachers who work with teenagers and only 32 percent of those who work with children (Search Institute, 57).

Have your teachers take the faith formation maturity scale at <http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/exploringfaithmaturity-adults.pdf>. See how they did. Which aspects of faith are they strongest in? Which need more formation?

Effective children's ministries also have a pastor who is highly committed to the program, devotes significant hours to the program, and also knows education theory and practice that's effective with children (Search Institute, 56). How much is your pastor involved in your children's ministry?

Educational process and education content include areas such as emphasizing intergenerational contact, creating a sense of community, involving children in service projects, effective teaching the Bible and core theological concepts and more (Search Institute, 56).

You also want to create your children's ministry in a way so that children can spend time together more (Search Institute, 56). Parents flee churches when their child is the only one (or one of two) in a class. Some churches have grouped different age groups together to create ways for children to interact

with each other. This can be difficult when you're working with young children since infants and 5 year olds are very different, but churches have found ways for children of different age groups to be together and get to know each other.

The last two categories are ones that children's ministries often overlook and don't realize how critical they are. This includes parent involvement and goals more (Search Institute, 56). Parents not only need ways to connect with each other, but it's critical for them to be involved in program decisions and planning. The final category is goals. Does your children's ministry have a clear mission statement? Does it have clear learning objectives?

Emphasizing the Link between Church and Home

As you plan your program and evaluate it, continue to look at the connections between church and home. The more you can build ways for families to talk about faith issues (and act on them) at home and the more you can strengthen your children's ministry at church, the more impact you'll have on families.

"Christian education matters much more than we expected," concluded the researchers who examined Christian education in churches. "Done well, it has the potential beyond any other congregational influence to deepen faith and commitment" (Search Institute, 2).

Whether we're playing with infants in the nursery, singing songs with toddlers, pretending we're running across the Red Sea to escape the Egyptians, or doing a family service project together at church, all of it matters. The way we interact with children, their parents, and their older siblings gives them a sense of whether or not they want to come back for more.

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The “Identity Crisis” of the Youth Minister

Lee Yates

I am living through an identity crisis. For many years I was a Youth Director or Youth Minister. It was a job title that I took pride in. Even after ordination, I was comfortable with the “less than real ministry” looks I got. I was comfortable with being lumped in with the untrained youth leaders on staff at other congregations. We shared a similar calling to serve young people and that was all that mattered. Now, I’ve come to a point where the title of “youth minister” gets my brain spinning. Frustration and well-rehearsed lectures swirl through my mind. It is amazing how I’ve come to see a ministry title, which was once important to me, as a detriment to the Church. Of all the words the Church has tried to make taboo (witness, testimony, sex, tithe, etc.), the one we should really start washing out mouths out with soap over is “Youth Minister.”

My critique of the title, “Youth Minister,” is different from many pastors who started out in educational ministry but saw themselves as moving “up” to different roles in the Church. While I never felt the need to prove I was “a real minister,” I can see the derogatory perspective of these pastors has shaped our current reality and makes the issue worth a moment of reflection. As the

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son of a Christian educator, I've heard snide comments that reflect this promotion mentality of ministry since I was a child. Terms such as, "real ministry" or "more mature calling" slipped out of pastors' mouths as they would casually described their new positions. The more self-aware of the bunch would often try to cover their self-aggrandizing comments with an awkward tag on such as, "not that there is anything wrong with working with children or youth." These comments highlighted what was painfully clear in the Church. Ministry with children and youth has always been treated as a lesser calling.

For many pastors, even today, ministry with youth and children is the area of church life where they practiced, as if young people are suitable test subjects. Ministers would make all their mistakes in the "minor leagues" before moving up to a pulpit. Clergy never seemed to understand how much power and influence they hold for these families. What was implicitly communicated to everyone was that the faith of the young was less important than the faith of the adults. It is no wonder so many young people have felt marginalized by the Church and it is no wonder that so many who feel called to serve them drew a line in the sand and professionalized this calling.

Paul Takes Sides

Scripture offers us Paul's letter to Timothy, a young man exploring his call to ministry. Paul's words have been preached in more youth led worship services than I can count. Paul seems to know that Timothy will face push-back as a young person trying to lead. Youth and youth ministers have found comfort and encouragement in this epistle. For a long time, every reading of this text was presented as a justification for youth ministry. Speaking from ancient days, Paul was telling the Church to open up its ears and listen to the voices of young people. Paul challenged youth not to be silent but to speak up and take on a mantle of responsibility. Timothy jumped off the pages of scripture as the mascot of youth empowerment

and the unofficial saint of modern Youth Ministers.

Ironically, many of the sermons I've heard on this text are by youth ministers to the congregations that called them to serve or by youth who have been invited to lead worship. Somehow, there was a disconnect between what was already being offered and what was desired. In many ways, it was "preaching to the choir." In a culture shaped by the civil-rights movement, there was no denying the voice of young people. While the Church does have a way of slowing things down, the voice of young people was getting louder. Unfortunately, within the Church, the voice of youth and advocates of youth used the time they were offered to proclaim the theological importance of their own voice. This "bunker mentality" has been a part of youth ministry as long as I can remember. Those leading seemed to think it was them, the young people, Paul and Timothy, all cramped into a room of the church basement together.

In *The Godbearing Life*, Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster coin the phrase, "One Eared Mickey Mouse" model of youth ministry. They echo the common descriptor of youth being ghettoized in both space and programming, only marginally connected to the full body of the Church. The Church receives well deserved criticism for isolating youth and not involving them in the life of the larger congregation. Still, there is also a critique of isolationist youth and youth leaders who have moved away from the full community of Church in search of independence. Razing flags with 1 Timothy 4 printed on them, youth found themselves, in many ways, more distant from the Church and I can only imagine Paul with his head in his hands, groaning something about being taken out of context.

Paul and Mary

Timothy was not the product of a youth group. There, I said it. Paul didn't start youth groups in Ephesus and Corinth and provide them with a book of games to help those gathered, "break

the ice” before diving into deep conversations about Isaiah and what the prophet would have said about cliques, pagan cults, or peer pressure. Paul was a mentor to Timothy and he was not alone. Timothy was raised by a Jewish mother and was part of a believing community. Paul, and those traveling with him, welcome Timothy into their intergenerational community of leaders. Paul never sent Timothy out as a lone-ranger to learn on the fly. Timothy’s faith was shaped and formed in community before being commissioned and sent out to serve.

Another young person in scripture who is thrust into the spotlight is Mary. Dean and Foster do a wonderful job of explaining Mary’s role as *Theotokos* or “Godbearer.” This is a powerful and very appropriate understanding of the way Christians bare God and Christ to others. It is a beautiful example of a young woman doing extraordinary things. Mary’s story could easily be lifted up, right out of context, as another example of youth empowerment. What we might miss is the role her family played. Mary is immersed in family as she faces the birth of her child. She is joining a new family with Joseph with deep roots in the story of her faith. After the birth of Jesus, Mary and her family are visited by magi or “wise” people who gather around her in a time of fragility.

Scripture was birthed by God through a multigenerational community of faith. The story of God’s people has been passed down from generation to generation, bringing the hearer into relationship with a larger family of faith. To isolate the story and the storytellers from that community, whether it be in a church basement or on a big stage with a band and strobe lights, is to unearth the story from its roots.

Bullpen Ministry

Despite these exegetical realities, the modern shape of youth ministry has grown more isolated and specialized. While this evolution was well intentioned, the outcome has been

detrimental to the Church. In an attempt to give youth a place to be themselves, we limited the diversity of voices that would shape their identity. In an attempt to reach youth on their level, we limited their ability to grow further. Most importantly, in an attempt to provide well trained leaders for our youth, we created youth ministers, which brings us back to my identity crisis.

I remember driving to church, listening to a story on the local sports radio channel. A pitcher, specifically the “closer” who pitches the 9th inning, had gotten hurt. The team was in disarray. They were over half-way through the season, battling for first place, and they had no one on their roster who could “close.” A trade was in the works. At first, it seemed like the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard. What was wrong with all the other professional players that kept them from throwing the ball for the last inning of a game? Then reality sunk in. I was a closer!

While training youth leaders, the Church catered to our culture’s outsourcing mentality and appeased the insecurity of parents who felt ill-equipped to teach faith. Soon, we had a specialization of ministry that resembled the bullpen of a baseball team. A main pitcher of the gospel was called to pastor the Church while specialized staff were brought in to fill specific roles. Among those pitchers was me, the high energy, fast ball throwing expert who would close the deal with our youth in the late innings of adolescence: the Youth Minister. And what happens when the closer can’t pitch or the youth minister leaves? Chaos.

Countless stories can be told of youth who feel they have no one to talk to when the youth minister leaves. Even in congregations where there are highly engaged adult leaders, there is a relational pedestal offered to the youth minister. For those of us in the role, it can be intoxicating. There is something powerful about being needed and young people can be very affirming (or overly dramatic) when emotionally connected. Youth leaders can easily mistake the appreciation of youth for successful faith formation. We get sucked in by our own sense of accomplishment or need to

be needed. Before long, we have claimed our place on the pedestal. Then, when staffing changes, we wonder why many of the young people are not more connected to the Church.

In reality, people hear the words, “Youth Minister” and quickly make assumptions. Some will assume this person is fun. Others will assume this person is disorganized. Others won’t care where this person came from because they are so relieved! Now the congregation has an expert on board who will do this important ministry for the community. Everyone can relax and enjoy the number of youth in worship. Everyone can feel good about the pictures from the youth mission trip being shared on Facebook. Everyone can step back from the youth and make room for the youth minister to do their thing.

Power of Words

I recently took a new ministry position which includes work with youth and camps. In the interview process, I was curious about many details of the job, but the most important thing in my mind was the title. This position was combining some previous job descriptions and related to some established ministry teams. While I really wanted the position, I had promised myself, “I will never accept the title of “Youth Minister” again.” My heart leapt when I was offered the position, including the title, “Minister of Faith Formation.” Finally, I had words for what I was truly called to do.

Guilt fluttered through my thoughts, wondering how my mother, who spent a lifetime in the field of Christian education would respond. I thought about all the late-night soap-boxes I had been on with colleagues about the importance of congregations having a youth minister. I wondered how much grief was I about to get and how much of my own identity was lost. It should have been no surprise that my mother, who pushed intergenerational ministry through her career, thought it really matched where the Church needed to be years ago. It turns out, the only

person really having a hard time letting go of the old youth minister inside me, was me.

Now, I find myself on a new soap-box, ready to wash the words and mentality of “Youth Minister” out of our collective Church consciousness. For some, this isn’t hard. The budget for a youth minister dried up before the language. For others, the number of youth dried up even faster.

Comedian, Tim Wilson once spoke about the “service” guy at a “service station.” Wilson would say to audiences, “Remember that guy that kept bugging you? He would ask about checking your oil. He would ask about checking your washer fluid. Finally you would tell him to go away! And he did. You can’t find anything that resembles service at a station anymore.”

In a similar way, the Church told youth, “You should have your own special things, but somewhere else. You should go do special things, but by yourselves. You should stay out of the grown-up Church.”

And they did!

Youth and children are doing amazing things in our world today, just somewhere else. It’s time for all of us to change our language and try new words. We need to find ways to invite people into life of our Church, not give them excuses to get out. We need to find ways to connect new people across the community of the Church, not isolate the ones who are left. We need to find ways to engage all God’s people in service to the world, not cater to our own needs.

Inviting, connecting, engaging and serving are all words that hold power and can be found on the websites of growing and vibrant congregations. They are all words that call us to be part of something bigger than ourselves. It is time to be one Church rather than loosely connected, psycho-socially appropriately aimed programming circles. One Church, with generations growing together, is much closer to the Church Paul described and served in scripture.

What's Next?

In *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, Mark DeVries gives a history of youth ministry and demonstrates the lack of impact that isolated youth ministry offers. DeVries makes a differentiation between the childhood faith perpetuated by isolated peer groups and the mature faith formed by engagement with different generations. DeVries argues that the shaping of family and participation in an intentional worship community have a much greater impact than any age specific programming.

This is not to say that children and youth should never have time away from adults. Some activities are much better suited to one generation or another. Part of a church community is building friendships with peers who share your faith. The problem is in the isolation of programming. A youth who participates in a Bible study on war and peace can learn and grow in their understanding. A youth who participates in the same study and discusses their thoughts with a grandparent who lived through World War II or a parent who only knew the Cold War as a child, can grow even deeper in their understanding. This is especially true if the conversation is held in the context of prayer.

One congregation I served attempted a mentoring program for all youth. Bruce was a farmer and volunteered to mentor one of the middle school boys. Along with Bruce's assigned youth, came a little brother. The three would walk Bruce's farm and work cattle. They would talk about the way to treat girls on a date and how to engage adults with respect. Bruce was asked to take on some additional leadership in the congregation and regretfully informed me he could not be a mentor the next year. I was disappointed at first, then heard that Bruce and the boys still went for their walks together. It seems, relationships are harder to quit than programs.

Equipping our families to grow together and connecting seekers of all ages with mature Christian families must be a primary goal of

congregations. As a Church, we form a special family beyond the traditional cultural definition. Mentoring, partnering, and accompanying one another will define our congregation's futures more than denominational identity, theology or programming.

The story of God and God's people will continue to be passed down from generation to generation. Faith will be shared through the reading of scripture, proclamation in worship, marches and protests to injustice, service to the poor, and hands clinched tight together in prayer. All these things and more will mark the Church as a people of God. This shared faith will shape all who enter into the community and those who witness God at work in its midst.

I know that I'm not the only one with an identity crisis. For many, bound by fond memories or personal insecurity, breaking away from a program centered model will be difficult. For some, sharing a more connected and intergenerational life will be a challenge. There are models emerging all around us to show how important and how beautiful this change can be. Just, please, don't make this any harder than it already is by naming someone as, "Youth Minister."

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Responding to the Diversity of Today's Adults

Janet Schaeffler, OP

The reality of the lives of today's adults can be described from many perspectives. It seems like every day there are new studies revealing more research, further observations, and deeper understandings about the diversity of adult life, especially as related to faith, and the practice of religion. One way of exploring the varied complexion of today's adults is generationally: early adulthood (20's-30's), middle adulthood (40s-mid-50s), mature adulthood (mid-50s-mid 70s), and older adulthood (75+).

Because this reality has been researched and reflected upon from various viewpoints, by numerous people, a variety of names have been given to these various generations. Zemke, Raines and Filipczak refer to them as Generation Y/Nexters, Generation X, Baby Boomers and Builders/Veterans/Traditionalists. Gaylor names them as Bridgers (Millennials/Net Generation), Busters (Generation X), Boomers (Prophet), and Builders (Hero/GI Generation). Mercadante uses the descriptions of Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers, The Silent Generation, and The Greatest Generation.

Becoming familiar with the characteristics of each of these groups can be extremely advantageous for leaders and planners of adult faith formation. Linda Mercadante states: "it was evident that...each person was inevitably affected by the events and thought patterns of the generation in

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which they grew up” (35).

At the same time, to group millions of people into one category calls for caution. Accurate as many of these descriptions are, they remain generalities.

We often speak of the older generation as all those 65+. Today, various researchers and practitioners divide maturing adults into subgroups. Anderson talks about Baby Boomers (1945-1964), The Silent Generation (1926-1944), and The Greatest Generation (1901-1925). Johnson divides maturing adults into Boomers (55-72 years), Builders (73+ years), and Elders (those who live very long lives).

Capps (vii, xxv-xxvi) also talks about the decades within each generation, most of which (the first eight decades) correspond to Erik H. Erickson’s life-cycle model):

- ◆ the pre-adult decades (the first decade: the hopeful self, and the second decade: the willing self)
- ◆ the younger-adult decades (the third decade: the purposeful self, and the fourth decade: the competent self)
- ◆ the middle adult decades (the fifth decade: the faithful self; the sixth decade: the loving self; and the seventh decade: the caring self)
- ◆ the older adult decades (the eighth decade: the wise self; the ninth decade: the graceful self; the tenth decade: the enduring self; and the eleventh decade: the 100 Club)

Thus, amid the common characteristics of a generation, the underlying guideline is always that each person is an individual. The hallmark of any adult gathering is heterogeneity. Adults are more likely to be different than the same. (A group of 60-year olds is different than a group of 40-year olds, and not all 60-year olds are the same.)

Another way of understanding today’s adults, especially on their faith journey, is the reality of spiritual dwellers and seekers as described by Wuthnow, Wick and others. Wuthnow calls the spirituality of the Hebrew

people in the wilderness “a spirituality of seeking” and the spirituality of the Hebrew people who have settled the land “a spirituality of dwelling.”

Today dwellers can be described as those who find comfort in tradition and are basically content with the spiritual path they have chosen; seekers find comfort in exploring new possibilities and see themselves “on the way” spiritually but not there yet.

Carl Jung illustrates this difference: “The person for whom the sun still revolves around the earth is essentially different from the person for whom the earth is a satellite of the sun.” Eric Hoffer touches upon the same reality: “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.”

What does this mean for adult faith formation? People want to be respected as capable of contributing to the “storehouse” of faith. They want their experiences and their insights to matter, to make a difference in the evolving story of faith. As participants in an “experience culture,” many today consider experience important and meaningful. They are more interested in experiencing God, not simply knowing about God. They’re more interested in *living* their faith rather than just affirming creeds. In the words of Harvey Cox: “The experience of the divine is displacing theories about it” (20).

Related to this dwelling/searching reality among adults is the increasing rise of “nones” (those who do not claim any particular communal faith identity) and SBNRs (spiritual but not religious). Although these two groups certainly encompass a diversity of individuals and numerous varied reasons for self-choosing these options, Mercadante found that, with those she interviewed, there were some similarities: “The interviewees did not shy away from discussing their beliefs, but seemed to relish these questions, take them seriously, and feel it was important for them to consider. Oftentimes when I asked for clarification or pointed to seeming inconsistencies or undeveloped areas, the interviewee would say

with amazement, 'I never thought of that!' and end with a hug and promise: 'Now you've given me something to think about!' Almost routinely participants thanked me profusely, saying they wished they could have more opportunities to have discussions like this." (18)

For Reflection & Discussion

- ◆ Do our adult formation opportunities respond to the unique life situations of the various generations?
- ◆ Do dwellers and seekers need different opportunities? What are we providing for each?
- ◆ Do our adult formation opportunities engage people in experiencing God or knowing about God and our faith?
- ◆ Do our adult faith formation efforts include welcoming ways to invite and/or provide for opportunities for "nones" and SBNRs to have the discussions they seek?

Communities of Like Interest

The reality is that today's adult formation can't be a "one size fits all" approach. McKenzie and Harton remind us

. . . 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. (120)

All we have to do is look at our churches, witness the diversity, and realize different groups need different things: parents of young children need something different than empty nesters; those who have just lost a job have

unique needs; people who are new in the faith need something different than those who have been deeply practicing the faith for years.

At the same time, there are many occasions when "mixed groups" are necessary and valuable. We learn from the wisdom and experiences of each other. Yet, many congregations report that they have much more response to offerings when the opportunities are for specific groups, for "communities of like interest."

For example, Scripture study programs for men seem to attract more men than a generic Scripture program. An offering for parents of young children meets a specific "community of like interest." (See www.janetschaeffler.com/GEMS_32.pdf for an (ongoing) event planned specifically for women. This issue of GEMS, www.janetschaeffler.com/Gems_13.pdf, illustrates an opportunity for those in mature and older adulthood.)

In today's world, the assumption that one program will meet the needs of everyone in the congregation has to be seriously reconsidered. At the same time, as in most things, that's not a hard and fast rule. There are certainly times when opportunities will be planned for the "whole church" (retreats, Lenten programs, etc.). Even in those, are there methods that can be employed to meet the needs of specific generational groups? Consider: small groups, use of technology, follow-up and at-home endeavors, etc.

People who are at different stages of human development and faith development, as well as in various transitions in their lives, will necessarily have differing faith and life questions. Adult faith formation calls us to be aware of both/and: the wisdom and strength which comes through intergenerational learning as well as planning for various "communities of like interest." Seth Godin reminds us: "A product for everyone rarely reaches anyone."

For Reflection/Discussion

- ◆ What is happening through our adult faith formation offerings that is directed toward various "communities of like interest?"

- ◆ What other “communities of like interest” have needs that could be met through various opportunities?
- ◆ How can the people within these communities be empowered to be leaders for the offerings/opportunities?

A Never-ending Range of Topics for Adult Faith Formation

Given the diversity and the various needs of today’s adults, the areas for exploration within adult faith formation are unending. Likewise, there is no compartmentalizing our lives. Everything that happens in our daily lives touches our faith growth. Therefore, the range of topics that can be, might be, and should be explored within adult faith formation opportunities (using all methods within face-to-face and virtually) is never-ending. Listed here are *just a few* of the many topics that might flow from the interests and needs of today’s adults:

Early Adulthood (20’s-30’s)

Here are a few topics that might flow from the interests and needs of early adults:

- The role of the Spirit in daily decision-making
- Predictable crisis in adult life; in the faith journey
- Single today: opportunities and challenges
- Family prayer
- Juggling the rhythms of family life
- Portraits in leadership: timeless tales for inspired living
- Christian alternatives in celebrating holidays
- When both spouses work
- Religion and spirituality rather than religion vs. spirituality

Real-life Examples

Many churches respond to the needs of those in their 20’s and 30’s through Charis Ministries (<http://charisministries.org/>) which offers retreats, leadership development and formation activities. During the Seekers’ Retreat, participants are invited to look at their lives to see where God has been, where God is present, and where God is calling them to be.

The Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis, MN hosts Sunday Night Live (www.mary.org/news-events/events/sunday-night-live-4?instance=0#.VC619ZXu2P8) inviting 20’s and 30’s to seek a connection with a community of peers. Monthly gatherings explore, in a discussion format, various issues of faith and everyday life, such as: “Balancing Simplicity and Abundance,” “Beyond Career to Calling,” and “Materialism and God.”

Middle Adulthood (40s-mid-50s)

Here are a few topics that might flow from the interests and needs of middle adults:

- Crisis points in marriage
- Single parent parenting skills
- My kids aren’t growing up like I did. Help!
- Being the church in the world
- Biblical reflections: find yourself in the stories of the Bible
- Seasons of the soul: The Christian life cycle
- Safety in a cyberspace age
- Media literacy: Knowing how the media influences (hoodwinks) me
- Traits of a healthy spirituality
- 9 to 5: spirituality of work
- Women in the church (and society)

Real-life Examples

The associate pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Church, Henderson, KY invites parishioners, on each Labor Day, to sign up if they would like him to visit them at their place of work during the coming year. Throughout the year he visits one or two parishioners each week in their workplace at a time convenient for them.

The purpose is not for a tour or to meet their employer or employees, but to be with them in their work setting, asking them two questions: 1) What do you do? 2) How do you feel about what you do? He then writes up the people's reflections in the coming Sunday bulletin in a column entitled, *The Sunday/Monday Connection*. Twice a year he invites the workers to a one hour session in small groups to share ideas and a discussion on the relationship between faith and work. (See www.janetschaeffler.com/Gems_1.pdf)

During one Lenten season, St. Edmund Parish, Warren, MI offered a series: *Sometimes I feel ____ (angry, stressed, lonely, guilty, unforgiving, etc.). What's a Christian to do?* A different presenter each week explored a feeling, highlighting practical responses through the Christian tradition. Many participants continued their support of each other through small groups and/or virtual conversation groups.

Mature Adulthood (mid-50s-75)

Here are a few topics that might flow from the interests and needs of mature adults:

- The joys and challenges of intergenerational households
- Support for the caregiver
- Helping parents deal with life's losses
- The joys of grandparenting
- Challenges of midlife transitions
- Passages of marriage
- Reconciliation in daily life
- Life in the balance: Christian perspectives on everyday medical dilemmas
- Living with integrity: navigating everyday ethical dilemmas
- From success to significance (later years)
- Taking charge of your health
- Growing older without fear
- Forgiveness: is it possible?
- The empty-nest syndrome

Real-life Examples

Christians from all over the world have explored and supported each other in mid-life spirituality through Boston College's C21 Online's course, *Autumn Blessings* (www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/stm/c21online/courses/autumn_blessings.html).

Book clubs respond to the need for belonging, new understandings and appreciations, and time for conversation about things that matter. Book clubs can happen face-to-face (at churches, homes, coffee shops, etc.) or virtually. A few of the many that occur all the time: www.doers.org/faith-formation/book-clubs/; http://trinitypresssc.org/book_club; <http://www.saintjoanofarc.org/parish-life/parish-book-club-o>. Julie McConaha says: "We have a three-pronged approach to our adult learning programming: spiritual development, life enrichment and community building. The Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Community's Parish Book Club was developed two years ago to enhance opportunities for community building. Its purpose is 'building community through shared experiences with great stories, and indeed, the group members are building rich friendships through their participation. The group decides their own selections and stays with memoir and fiction. We have an additional adult learning offering, for spiritual development, called Scripture Matters, whose members focus on theological and spiritual books." (For a unique process of inviting and gathering adults for a parish book study see: www.janetschaeffler.com/Gems_14.pdf.)

Today's society often finds adults who are suddenly unemployed. Churches are offering various helps to walk this journey. St. Joseph, Lake Orion, MI hosted several sessions which are now available online (www.stjosephlakeorion.org/stewardship/resources/unemployment.html): the spiritual challenges of being unemployed, thoughts from an employer, the emotional effects of unemployment, and practical tips for seeking re-employment.

Older Adulthood (75+)

Here are a few topics that might flow from the interests and needs of older adults:

- Facing losses gracefully
- Wisdom—the gift of age: what do I do with it?
- Taking stock: finding meaning in later life
- Coping with illness
- Life after retirement: writing the next chapter
- Choosing lifestyle changes in later life
- New-old ways to pray
- The comfort and challenge of the Resurrection
- The best is yet to come (elder spirituality)
- The 12 keys of successful aging
- Jesus laughed—do you?

Real-life Examples

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 elderly. 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.”

One of the very helpful activities for the older adult is a life review: a way to intensify gratitude and leave a legacy. This 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 elderly to compose a spiritual/life autobiography, see <http://store.pastoralplanning.com/beprspau.html>.

For more ideas regarding diverse topics, see: <http://www.janetschaeffler.com/Best-Practices.html>, issues #23, #24, and #27 and http://www.janetschaeffler.com/Lens_of_Everyday_Life_Needs.pdf.

For Reflection & Discussion

- ◆ How will you determine whether these topics are of interest and will respond to the needs of your parishioners?
- ◆ What would be some of the “delivery systems” you could use to involve people in formation around these topics?

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Milestones Ministry: An Effective Model for Lifelong Faith Formation

Debbie Streicher

A faith milestone is a marker along life's journey that says, 'This is something important and God is here, too.' It is a faith formation practice for both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God's presence in everyday life.

David Anderson

In theory, Sunday school is a good model to teach the Christian faith. However, in many congregations across the country, attendance is low and leadership is thirsting for a magic pill to make it all better and move back to the success of the past. We try name changes. We try time changes. We try weaving Christian education into worship services. Across denominations, we have shown concern and been in conversation about the need to revisit the way we plan and execute Christian education programs for more than a decade. *The Teaching Church* by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* by Charles Foster were written in the mid-90's. Both are relevant today and are being used by leaders to help re-evaluate the way we do faith formation.

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Recently I was in conversation with a pastor who has been in an interim position in a congregation for the past 18 months. He has been trying to move the congregation ahead and invite them to do ministry differently. Establishing a children's worship service did not work. Adding a fellowship time was not helpful. Something he said caught my attention and helped me put into words the reality we face today. He said, "People will not give to a failing enterprise." It is hard to admit that we, as church leaders are placed in roles to manage, oversee, and facilitate a failing enterprise. By replacing the word enterprise with organization, I feel we face the truth about where we stand today in the church and find myself asking, "What can we do to turn this organization around?" and "What needs to change so that people are moved to give their time to the organization?"

In this article I propose that, as leaders, we think outside the church walls. Rather than think we can attract people through worship and Christian education programs, we should ask questions about people's needs and wonder how we can address them. We should begin to think about where we can find a crossroad to meet the needs of the people with the richness we can bring to their lives through the Christian faith. Let's view our communities through a different lens and provide opportunities to gather and celebrate the meaningful moments and times in their lives by adding the element of faith to those times.

- ◆ How often do we go to a birthday party and not thank God for another year in our lives?
- ◆ How often do we hand the keys of the car to a new driver without blessing safe travels?
- ◆ How often do we honor and appreciate and pray for those who are caring for loved ones?
- ◆ How often do we enrich everyday happenings and milestones in our lives that happen both in and beyond the church walls such as becoming a

grandparent, getting a new home, or a new job?

A Different Approach

Historically, Sunday school was established as a way to reach unchurched children in urban areas. Although Sunday school can still play an important role in congregations, families' busy schedules and sporadic church attendance sometimes hinder its effectiveness. That's where Milestones Ministry steps in. It can help strengthen the church's role in the community through simple, yet memorable, celebrations of important life events.

Milestones Ministry provides a creative and different approach to faith formation. In some cases, milestones replaces the system for Christian education. It does not have to be a weekly event or class. It can happen monthly and include all ages, from infant to adult. People feel compelled to get involved because each event embraces a significant milestone in the life of someone they know and love. And it involves all ages because when we celebrate special times in our lives, it involves the entire family. We tend to *show up* for birthdays and baby showers and other family times. Taking one more step outside the box, let's think about inviting these events to happen in private homes as well as in the church building. "*Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church too*" is one of five principles listed in the book *Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* by David W. Anderson. All milestones ministry events include caring conversations, prayers, and blessings that immerse one in a faith journey alongside family and friends.

Milestones Ministry includes five parts: Naming, Equipping, Blessing, Gifting, and Reinforcing. By incorporating these into each Milestones Ministry event and providing monthly event opportunities throughout the year, it gives each milestone a greater chance to take deeper root in lifelong faith formation. (See the example at the end of the article.)

Naming

- ◆ Identify meaningful and memorable moments in people's lives.
- ◆ Honor, celebrate, and name significant events and times such as birth, the beginning of school, getting a driver's license, graduation, a new job, parenthood, grandparenthood, retirement and more.
- ◆ Enable people to name the holy in life, recognize milestones along life's journey, and take the time to be nurtured in the Christian faith in home and congregation.

Equipping

- ◆ Provide a basic framework for faith practices, caring conversations, devotions, service, rituals, and traditions as a way to experience milestones as a faith-forming moment
- ◆ Provide activities for an intergenerational event in the congregation
- ◆ Provide activities for celebrating in the home

Blessing

- ◆ Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment
- ◆ Offer a prayer and special blessing during worship for this milestone
- ◆ Offer a prayer to use in small groups or to use with family at home

Gifting

- ◆ Give a visual reminder to help the milestone moment be recalled again and again
- ◆ Provide a gift as a visible sign that gives witness to one's faith

Reinforcing

- ◆ Host a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated
- ◆ It is not unusual to recognize baptism, first Bibles, a mission trip, or entering Sunday school to mention a few, but I invite you to

think beyond these and consider how to recognize other milestones in the lives of those in our communities.

Milestones in Church Life and Daily Life

Many congregations celebrate milestones related to the sacraments and others to life transitions in the congregation such as entering Sunday school and first Bible. Events are designed for the entire year and often a schedule is sent to parents and families. For example:

Milestone	Age	Date
Welcoming Children to Worship	2-4 years old	Late August
Entering Sunday School	3 year olds	Early Sept
First Bible	1 st grade	Mid-Oct
Communion	2 nd grade	March
Confirmation	8 th grade	May
Graduation	HS Seniors	June

Faith formation around milestones, sacramental celebrations, and life transitions provides an excellent way to promote the spiritual and faith growth of all ages and generations, enhance family faith practice at home, and strengthen people's engagement in the church community or invite people to join or rejoin the church community.

As we move into the future together in ministry, a calendar like the one you see below including milestones in our daily lives can create outreach opportunities we can envision as an effective model for faith formation. What milestones could be done in your community?

Milestone	Age	Date
Driver's License	16 years old	August
Blessing Backpacks & Briefcases	K-Adult	Sept
Retirement	Adult 55+	Oct

New Job	Teen-Adult	Jan
Empty Nest	Adult	March
Prayer	All Ages	April

All milestone (both congregational and daily life) events include the entire family, friends, and relatives. They happen in large gathering settings and in the home. We recently celebrated my husband's retirement in our home. We invited friends, family, and neighbors.

- ◆ *Naming:* This was a time to recognize my husband's retirement and transition to a new lifestyle.
- ◆ *Equipping:* We enjoyed dinner together, showed pictures of his work history, and engaged in caring conversations.
- ◆ *Blessing:* Each person present passed a stone with retirement written on it and gave a wish about my husband's retirement and gave him a blessing. We said a prayer.
- ◆ *Gifting:* The gift was the stone as a remembrance of the occasion.
- ◆ *Reinforcing:* The stone is a reminder every day of this special time. We often reflect on the stone and plan to intentionally revisit the topic of retirement and talk about how life has changed at the end of the year.

I asked our pastor how many have retired in our congregation in the past year. The answer was 15 or more. I have begun to think about those 15 and about their friends who may have retired also. What milestones can be recognized in your own congregation and community this year?

Milestones Outside the Church Walls

It is not unusual to recognize baptism, first Bibles, a mission trip, or entering Sunday school, but I invite you to think beyond these and consider how to recognize other

milestones in the lives of those in our communities.

Is there a middle or high school nearby? Is there a nursing home in the area? Is there a military base close by the church? What are the needs of these people? What would invite them into a relationship with Christ? What would make them want to give their time?

Is the church near a nursing home?

Celebrate 70, 80, and 90 year old birthdays. Go to them or invite them along with their families to come to you. Or honor and bless caregivers for those individuals. Both family and staff are caregivers. Those in their 70's, 80's, and 90's are the ones who filled our churches over the years. How can we recognize this?

Is the church near a middle school?

Celebrate birthdays for the month. Post a banner outside the church and name one day each month where you have a party for teens. Invest in a large TV and updated video games. Provide free internet service, or invite one of the high school or middle school bands or musicians to participate. Take time for a blessing and prayer. Equip families with ideas and tools to celebrate their own teen's special day in their home with a prayer and blessing.

Is the church near a military base?

Families are constantly in transition on a base. There are some leaving for deployment and others returning. Recognize both occasions and invite families and singles for a time to be together and celebrate this significant time in their lives.

A New Venture

This past August, David Anderson and I were asked to manage Milestones Ministry (www.milestonesministry.org). David's wife, Gloria, and my husband, Burt, complete the team in our new venture together. We are committed to practicing these milestones

hands-on with each other, with our children, with our grandchildren, with family and friends, and in our congregations. We look forward to sustaining and growing this ministry by listening to you, hearing your stories, and sharing those stories with others so that we may learn together.

As leaders in the congregation our responsibility is to help others understand and recognize God's presence in everyday life. How we go about doing that and the tools we use is part of the challenge we face daily.

Opportunities to gather all the ages together to identify and bless God's presence throughout our lives for milestone occasions can be provided as ministry events. Let's not overlook the impact and potential these events can have in building our faith community. And also the lasting impact they can have for each

of us. I look forward to writing and sharing stories from congregations using Milestones Ministry in the next year. I believe we can all glean ideas and support one another in this ministry.

We are on a journey together to pass the faith from one generation to the next. *Let us rejoice and be glad in it!* (Psalm 118:24b)

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Sample Page from an Adult Milestone



Retirement Milestone

In our society, retirement is a recognized civic and personal milestone in the life of an individual. It signifies a major life transition, impacting the retiree as well as the spouse and/or extended family members.

Retirement often means a major change in one's lifestyle, as life is no longer organized around a work schedule or the requirements of one's career. Retirement may signify a new sense of freedom and opportunities previously only dreamed about. Retirement may also represent loss, including a loss of income and benefits, status and identity, one's primary purpose and focus in life, and social contact with peers.

With more than 79 million baby boomers qualifying for retirement over the next few years, the faith community has an opportunity to mark this milestone by celebrating an individual's gifts, wisdom, history and contributions to church and society. It is an opportunity to connect a life story with God's Story and share one's faith with the next generations.

With people living longer, healthier lives, retirement has taken on new meaning in our culture. Congregations have a vital role in marking this time of endings as well as supporting people in discerning God's call in the third-third of life. As Christians, retirement is an opportunity for "re-firement" as God continuously calls us to serve in Jesus' name.

This Retirement Milestone incorporates a simple structure that includes:

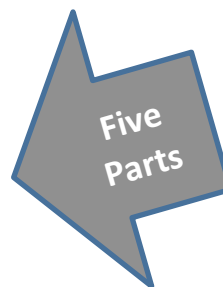
Naming – It is important to mark retirement as an ending, a transition in one's work and career, and a time for new beginnings as called children of God through baptism.

Equipping – This milestone acknowledges a worker's gifts, life experiences and wisdom that can be shared with the congregation, surrounding community and next generations.

Blessing – The blessing says that a significant personal and professional transition in one's life is also about faith.

Gifting – A gift to the retiree is a powerful way of saying, "We remember you and appreciate you. God will continue to be active in your life and walk with you in your journey." (See Appendix 1 for ideas.)

Reinforcing – Retirement offers many opportunities for congregations to offer ongoing support and resources to retirees who are members of the congregation as well as those who are neighbors in the community. The Retirement Milestone Follow Up is on page 7.



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Welcome to the Milestones Ministry website! You can now order **Milestones modules, Blessing Bowls, Stones, and Taking Faith Home** bulletin inserts by clicking on the store tab above.

If you have questions please call **304-300-0836**.

Debbie Streicher and David Anderson are delighted to begin a new venture in this ministry together.

They can be contacted by email:
dstreicher@milestonesministry.org or
danderson@milestonesministry.org.

The mission is to provide congregations and households with products, seminars/instruction, and coaching services to nurture the Christian faith and reach out to others with the love of God in Christ.

The focus of the work is on Milestones Ministry and Taking Faith Home. Milestones Ministry takes meaningful, memorable moments (i.e., baptism,

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The Four Keys

At the heart of Milestones Ministry are the Four Keys faith practices: Caring Conversations, Devotions, Service, and Rituals and Traditions.



The Intergenerational Top Seven

What You Must Know & Do to Be Successful at Intergenerational Ministry

Jim Merhaut

Many clearly discernable principles and practices of intergenerational ministry are emerging as the intergenerational approach to ministry becomes more ingrained in churches around the world. This essay represents a top-seven list that has been distilled from the research and practice over several decades. The list is not exhaustive and not in order of priority. The seven keys to success with intergenerational ministry that I have selected as my focus are: 1) Hospitality, 2) Parent Witnessing, 3) Connecting Families, 4) Church-Wide Mentoring, 5) Emphasis on Benefits for Old and Young, 6) Relevant Content, and 7) Diverse Methods.

1. Hospitality

The heart of intergenerational ministry is hospitality. Intergenerational relationships are only possible when people become willing to welcome those who are different from themselves into their lives. The word hospitality is an apt description of what this welcoming disposition is like.

Hospitality has been described not only as love for a guest, but also as love for a stranger. The New Testament Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia* (Pineda, 33). *Philoxenia*, love of strangers, is the polar opposite of *xenophobia*, fear of strangers. In contemporary western culture, the

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generations have become strangers to each other. We live our lives dominated by age-segregated experiences. Adults congregate with adults, teens congregate with teens, and children congregate with children. For many decades, this was accepted as the norm, but lately we are becoming more aware of the social and developmental risks involved in keeping the generations apart from each other. Sometimes these generational rifts create fear and suspicion that is analogous to *xenophobia*.

Intergenerational ministries begin by breaking down the fear of strangers that keeps old and young from spending time together. Each generation needs to open the doors of their hearts to welcome members of other generations in. Hospitality is the entry point for intergenerationality.

A mainstay of successful intergenerational gatherings from family reunions to church learning sessions has been food sharing. Offering and sharing food is a core hospitality strategy. Every church has its own way of creating community meals, so local traditions rule the day when it comes to what the meal should look like. Food brings down the defenses like nothing else and promotes an atmosphere of belonging and sharing.

Icebreakers are also an essential tool for the intergenerational practitioner. While icebreakers are necessary for all kinds of gatherings, intergenerational icebreakers need to focus on breaking down the generational barriers. If you are using a game, the teams should have representatives from each age group. If you are starting a program with a few focus questions, the discussion groups should be made up of mixed ages. Get young and old talking to each other, and laughing with each other.

2. Parent Witnessing

Parents are the key to passing on faith to children and teens. Leaders who make it a priority to establish strong positive relationships with parents in the community are well on their way to building

intergenerationality into the culture of their church. But before we discuss parents in particular, we have to discuss adults in general.

Any faith formation program that has children and/or teens as its primary focus will fail in the long run. The adult faith community sets the tone for a church. The culture of every church is determined by the values that are embraced and endorsed by the adult community. Children and teens absorb the values that are passed down to them by the adults in the community, especially the adults with whom they have the most contact. Parents have the most power. Other adults have power only insofar as parents give it to them. Even teachers have little chance of influencing children if parents are not supporting what is happening in a classroom. This journal and many other reputable publications cite the research on this regularly, so there is no need to repeat it here.

Churches that find ways to help parents witness to their children about their own faith are churches that raise faithful Christians, generation after generation. Parents can be given opportunities to witness in two ways: in deed and in word.

You can help parents witness in deed by transforming your churches current service learning experiences into family service learning experiences. Or begin by creating simple projects for families. Send whole families out on service projects in your community. When children see their parents helping other people, the experience creates an indelible visual image in their memory that will last a lifetime. They will never forget the time they participated in a neighborhood clean-up with mom or the time they served at the food pantry with dad. Some churches gather families for cooking/baking sessions for local homeless shelters or soup kitchens.

You can help parents witness in word by inviting the families back to the church when they are finished with their service project for a simple sharing about what they experienced, what difference it made in the community, and how it brought out a generous spirit in

each of them. Don't forget to prepare an enjoyable snack for them that they can share while they discuss. This simple experience and no-frills discussion is all you need to build disciples for the future while affirming your adult disciples today.

Here's another way to incorporate parents as teachers. Continue to use the same textbooks you have always been using in your classrooms, but now invite parents to come into the classroom at least once per month. Parents with more children will come more regularly. Ask your teachers to prepare a simple lesson that the parents and children can do together under the teacher's supervision. If the early experiences are well-planned and enjoyable, over time this will become what is expected in your church and parents will look forward to doing it. As the year progresses, you may consider inviting parents to keep one of their children home for a week and do his or her lesson at home. The following week could be for a second child if the family has more than one child in the program. You could also encourage parents to provide a special treat for the child who stays home to make it more inviting and enjoyable.

There are many ways to get parents involved as witnesses. The benefits of doing so are abundant. The key is to shift the emphasis of your programming away from children and teens and onto adults. Then you will begin to discover many ways to draw parents more deeply into the faith formation process.

3. Connecting Families

Churches are essentially made up of a number of families and individuals coming together for the common purpose of worshipping God. Worship, of course, is not something that happens in a vacuum. It has a context. The context is the love that a group of people have for God and for each other. This love, if the worship is authentic, ultimately spills out in service to the community beyond the church.

Building connections among the families that make up your church is an essential

intergenerational task. If it doesn't happen, worship is hollow because it does not have the proper context. When families become friends, the community comes to life.

Large intergenerational programs are effective ways to pass on the faith from one generation to the next, but they are not always the best way to build up your community. Smaller gathering of families, sometimes within a larger program and other times as a separate program, are necessary to build up the bonds of love that make Christian communities what they are called to be—communities of love.

Some churches will group families together for an entire year as a small group within a larger intergenerational program. These families will experience all of the programming as a group and get to know each other very well over the course of a year. Children become comfortable with non-parent adults within the comfort of their own parent's supervision. Other programs, such as the Logos program at Grace Methodist Church in Coal Center, PA, group children with non-parent adults for the meal at the beginning of each weekly program. This is how they get inter-family mingling happening on a weekly basis. (See a case study of Grace Methodist at: <http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/models--approaches.html>.)

Other programs such as Family-Centered Religious Education (FIRE) by Kathy Chesto are designed specifically to create smaller church communities within a larger church. Each FIRE community is made up of four-seven families. The families get together once or twice per month and experience all of their faith formation activities without separating the adults from the children.

There are many ways to bring families together in intergenerational groupings, but connecting families to each other requires the deliberate effort to forge friendships among families. This happens when families have opportunities to interact with other families over an extended period of time with adequate repetitive contact with those same families. The key is to give them enough contact so that

they really get to know each other well—enough contact with the right kinds of engaging activities and discussions so that they have time and reasons to fall in love with each other.

4. Church-Wide Mentoring

“What is your drop-dead plan?” she asked when I showed my finance director a number of new initiatives that I was going to develop for the organization in the coming year. She noticed my puzzled look and said that the projects looked very promising but they were too dependent upon my skill set. If I were to die during the implementation of some of these projects, the projects would die with me. What is your drop-dead plan? It’s a great question. Have you prepared a team to share in the planning and implementing of your programs? Have you prepared people to come after you? In short, how are you mentoring others into the important things that you are doing? Ministries are sustainable if each generation prepares the next generation to take over and breathe new life into the ministry.

Intergenerational mentoring refers to one generation passing on ministry skills to another generation. While older generations may mentor teens into Bible practices or worship skills, younger generations can mentor older generations into effective use of technology or social media.

Some mentoring is designed to provide a surrogate for a missing parent. Christian Association of Youth Mentoring (www.caym.org) specializes in training churches and other organizations to develop safe and comprehensive mentoring programs for at-risk children and youth.

Lutheran Social Services (www.lsssd.org/children_services/mentor_program) provides weekly opportunities for adults to mentor children and teens in public schools. This form of mentoring adds one more significant adult into the life of a child, giving that child a better chance of making it to adulthood safely.

These formal examples of mentoring are helpful to explore because of their well-founded practices. They have polished strategies and a discernable structure that reveals what works in mentoring programs and what pitfalls to avoid. Churches need to apply the effective practices of mentoring across all church ministries. For example, seasoned worship leaders can look for ways to integrate teens into roles side-by-side with adult worship leaders. Kitchen helpers at the church can mentor young boys and girls who show an interest in cooking. Churches that have arts and crafts groups can offer special programs for the child faith formation program to bring the generations together to pass on a skill and to build lasting friendships across the generations.

5. Emphasis on Benefits for Old and Young

Many churches have given in to the temptation to become kid-centered organizations in contrast to their founder who clearly spent the bulk of his time forming the faith of adults. As mentioned above, churches need to shift their faith formation focus away from children and toward adults.

Even when churches embrace intergenerational ministries, they often do so with a kid-centered perspective. Adults who attend feel like spectators rather than active participants. Facilitators speak to the whole intergenerational group the way an elementary school principal speaks to a school assembly.

The skilled intergenerational practitioner directs the bulk of her faith formation efforts to adults without neglecting the needs of children. When children and adults engage in formational experiences together, the benefits run both ways on a two-way street. Adults in intergenerational groups are not present just to facilitate the faith formation of children and teens; rather, they are formed as well by the presence of children and teens. Children have a way of opening up certain dimensions of the

kingdom of God that are inaccessible to adults when they cease to interact with children.

Children are essentially needy people. Their health and well-being depends entirely on adults who hold all the power cards. Adults who don't spend time with children are at risk for becoming too independent and too self-reliant. They forget that a key learning in childhood is to accept that we are essentially dependent upon a power that is outside of us. Adults need the presence of children for faith formation as much as children need the presence of adults. Erik Erikson believed that children bring up adults as much as adults bring up children (Chapman).

Many churches that excel at intergenerational faith formation deliberately form small intergenerational groups for learning activities. They design the activities so that children and adults will interact with each other and have meaningful faith discussions with each other. Great intergenerational practitioners understand that children are teachers too. Children offer fresh and simple insights that adults tend to miss because of their inclination to make things complex and to get into habitual ruts.

Another significant benefit that children bring to adults is that they call adults to be generative. Their very presence reminds adults that their words and actions have an impact on the generations that follow them. When adults spend their free time exclusively with other adults, they are more likely to forget that they have a responsibility to model mature behavior for the next generation. Intentionally creating intergenerational groups in your ministries will remind adults about their call to be generative.

6. Relevant Content

Faith formation would be easy if all we had to do was to present the doctrines of Christianity in a systematic way. It would be easy for the leaders and painful for the participants. We would eventually drive most of our members

out of our churches, which, by the way, is happening in a lot of places.

Faith formation hits home when the content is built from the ground up. In other words, the content starts with the values of the participants. When an intergenerational group gathers, there are multiple values in the room that have to be addressed in order for significant formation to happen. Children have their minds on one thing. Teens have their minds on something entirely different. Young parents are preoccupied with a host of things. Older adults have their unique concerns too. Single people don't value the same things that families value. Great intergenerational faith formation leaders know at any given time the hopes and concerns of each generation in the church community, but how?

The answer to how is not an easy one. It takes time and dedication to stay on top of the hopes and concerns of multiple generations, but it must be done if faith formation is going to matter to people.

The first step to accomplishing this is to build a team of leaders. If you create a team, you can have one person assigned to be your child expert, another can be your teen expert, another can be your young parent expert, another can be your young singles expert, and another can focus on older adults. Each person's responsibility is to keep a finger on the pulse of a particular subculture in your church. When the team gathers to develop intergenerational ministries, they will build the content around the various hopes and concerns that are most pressing today. If you address these hopes and concerns, all participants will walk away from your intergenerational ministry feeling like you made a significant contribution to their lives.

7. Diverse Methods

I was recently at a concert in a small winery that seated about 100 people. A young-adult woman was performing original music from her most recent album. In the middle of her performance, she asked everyone who had a

smart phone to pull it out and go to her website. Every table in the room had at least one person with a smart phone. She pointed out three buttons on her homepage and asked everyone to select one and then turn up the volume of the phone. Slowly the room filled with the sound of a g-major chord coming from the combined tones of all the cell phones in the room. Her next song, which was taken from her most recent album, was built entirely around the chord that was sustained in the room by the tones ringing forth from the cell phones.

The example above represents an ingenious method that would work for just about any group of people. The whole audience was involved and deeply moved by the performance that started with each person's cell phone.

Relevant content is important, but even relevance is not enough to get people excited about intergenerational ministry. The delivery method is the key to making the content accessible. Take a look at the following list of faith formation methods that are appropriate for age-specific and intergenerational programming:

- Games
- YouTube videos
- Simulations
- Webinars
- Music
- Small discussion groups
- Internet searches
- Arts and crafts
- Doodling
- Simple poems
- Self-guided online learning
- Demonstrations
- Texting
- Field trips
- Drama
- Puppets (small and larger than life)
- Tactile experiences of symbols
- Storytelling
- Social media

Build a list like this and add to it continually. Keep it in your team planning room to refer to for inspiration when you are trying to decide the best way to deliver your relevant content. As a general rule, the more delivery methods you use, the more likely you will reach your diverse audience. It is not unusual for one content piece to be delivered in three or four different ways and at different times. Repetition is important and a blend of on-site and at-home delivery increases the chances that your content will be integrated into the lives of your church members.

Conclusion

Intergenerational ministry cuts to the heart of a church's identity as the body of Christ. The whole body can't be experienced when some of the generations are not present. All Christian churches need to develop the skills that are necessary to engage all of the generations together, or we will not be able to know the body of Christ ourselves or show the world what that body looks like. Intergenerational ministry is as important for us as it is for those who watch us. This list of the "Igen Seven" is a solid checklist for your church and a reference point for developing successful inter-generational ministry. Now let's get to work!

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Digital Media for Ministry Brief: Communications & Evangelism

Kyle Matthew Olive

For the past three years, I've helped organize an event at Virginia Theological Seminary called *e-Formation*. It began as a learning exchange between an invited group of national ministry innovators and a few technology experts active in local congregations. It became a yearly conference and year-round learning community under the banner of "faith formation for a connected, digital world."

Of course, digital communication tools are an important part of any effort to use technology in Christian formation, and some of what we did in our sessions was teach the tools. But we always took pains to advertise that we were primarily church *educators*, not church *communicators*.

It didn't seem to matter—communicators kept showing up, and they kept asking for more programming for folks with their role. We think there are several reasons for their persistence:

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1. More and more faith formation ministers are being asked to do double duty as church communicators.
2. There are only a couple other organized, large-scale efforts to train church communicators in digital media tools and techniques.
3. There is still only a relatively small segment of church leaders willing to push the boundaries of what our faith communities can and should do with technology, so communicators figure that getting trained with a bunch of faith formation ministers is better than nothing.

Whatever the reasons, they've kept coming, and we've kept learning. In fact, we've been learning about more than just communications.

Thus, this year's *Lifelong Faith Journal* will feature a series of Digital Media for Ministry Briefs on topics other than faith formation. Whether you're formally involved in these other areas of church ministry or not, we trust that as a faith formation minister or other church leader, you care about the renewal and vitality of your community. We think these tools and techniques will help. We want you to understand the big picture and most popular approaches, as well as to keep your eyes open for what might be on the horizon. And we'll begin, appropriately enough, with communications and evangelism.

Big Picture: Know Your Audience(s)

I am a big fan of experimentation online. When I started my job as "digital missionary" (the first-ever position with that title, so far as my boss and I know), I got online and tried things. Lots of things. I played. I tinkered. I started with the tools I knew. I wrote on the subjects I knew. But I also set up accounts with abandon, read blogs and took courses I haven't given a second thought to in years,

created videos that have only been seen by a handful of people.

Some of that work was absolutely essential. Some of it was a total waste of time. I realize now that one word would have helped me better conceptualize and prioritize my efforts: *audience*.

Audience may not be the word that resonates for you. It's a communications word more than an evangelism one. *Community* might be more theologically evocative. *Network* might be savvier and more descriptive of the structural realities of the World Wide Web. Whichever word best captures them in your imagination, there's a group of people out there whom you're trying to reach with the good news of God among us—and of your faith community's witness in God's name.

Some of these folks you've met. Others have not yet darkened your door and may not know your church exists. They all respond to different stories, and they all have their own individual preferences about how and when to hear from you. ***Your first job is to get as specific as you can about who they are and about what you want to tell them about your church or other faith community.***

My friend and colleague Julie Lytle has a motto that anticipates the technological enthusiasm of geeks like me and tries to keep us on track: "Message, Method, *then* Media" (121). Your message will always be shaped by the people you're sharing it with and how you choose to go about that sharing.

For instance, the parish I serve offers several evangelism-oriented activities each year, including two services of Advent lessons and carols, a pet blessing on the Feast of St. Francis, and "Ashes to Go" near a local subway stop on Ash Wednesday. Here's what we want to say about those events, and to whom.

- ◆ Arts lovers: Prepare for Christmas by recharging your spirit with sacred seasonal music.
- ◆ Pet owners: Give thanks for your pets with other animal lovers from our neighborhood.

- ◆ Commuters: Find a moment of holy reflection before or after your busy workday.

We share these messages in a variety of ways, including online advertising via our website and social media.

Until you've answered the message and method questions at least provisionally for the stories you're hoping to tell, you're unlikely to make communications decisions that move your church toward its goals in an efficient manner. That doesn't mean you can't have fun playing around with Twitter and Vimeo and Meetup in the process. But it does mean you should be convening some strategic conversations sooner rather than later.

The best resource I know for shaping such conversations is found in chapter 2 of *Speaking Faithfully*, a book by church communications specialists Jim Naughton and Rebecca Wilson. I really can't recommend this reference highly enough, and in pretty much every section of this article, I'll leave checking out what they have to say on the subject as an exercise to the reader. I've learned much of what I know from them.

Naughton and Wilson offer a step-by-step process to guide your big-picture discernment, culminating in an editorial calendar that will help you make a plan and stick to it. The communications arm of the United Methodist Church offers a [similar planning process](#). And Julie Lytle offers an abbreviated set of question you can begin asking right now about the service and proclamation your community is up to:

WHO
is saying/doing/providing WHAT
to/for WHOM
at what PLACE/SPACE (WHERE)
at what TIME (WHEN)
for what PURPOSE (WHY)
by what AUTHORITY
for whose
BENEFIT/EMPOWERMENT/PROFIT
at whose
EXPENSE/DISEMPOWERMENT/COST

and with what models/techniques/tools for ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION (Naughton and Wilson, 126-127)

Once you've gotten your head around these formative questions, you're ready to start thinking about the tools that can help make your vision a reality.

Tool Profiles: Four Essential Media

Website Builders: Wordpress, Weebly, & Squarespace

On a recent visit with friends from college, I had the kind of conversation any evangelist dreams of. My friends were getting ready for their first child and thinking seriously about the need to be plugged in to a church community. Neither felt particularly connected to the denomination they grew up in, but they thought my denomination seemed promising. They agreed to come with me to a church I thought they'd like, and we checked the website for the following morning's service times.

And that's how we ended up at church an hour late on the first Sunday of their summer schedule. The website, of course, was out-of-date. Not an awesome first impression.

This story used to be pretty common. It was never excusable, but it was at least understandable. To update the website, you had to get the new information to a technowizard, who changed some lines of code in a mysterious file with a ".html" in its name and FTPed the file on to a remote webserver, whatever that means.

These days, anyone can change an online service time with a username and password, an Internet connection, a few clicks, and a text editor no more complicated than Microsoft Word. If your church has not made the switch to an easy-to-use content management system (CMS), make that your top communications

priority. It will help you take control of your website content.

This is not the place for a detailed comparison of the options. There are lots of comparison and tool reviews online if you want the full blow-by-blow. But here's my distillation of the landscape:

1. If you and your team have limited technical abilities and need to build the website yourself, go with [Weebly](#). Baseline functionality is free, and the design interface is about as simple as it gets.
2. If you and your team have the time, some technical confidence, and a decent eye for aesthetics, you can design and build the site yourself. I think [Wordpress](#) and [Squarespace](#) are the most flexible and powerful tools with the best potential for a site that looks great.
3. If you're somewhere in between—maybe not feeling up to building the site but confident you could maintain it with some training—find someone to help you build the site and then hand off the keys with a thorough tutorial. [Faith Growth](#) is a reputable vendor providing this kind of service.

As for content, *which is the more important issue*, be sure to (1) make the language accessible, (2) organize the information in a way that communicates who you are as a community, and (3) have an obvious place on the site for first-timers. And one last thing: check to be sure your site looks good on a smart phone. If not, talk to your designer or your team about finding a “responsive” template, one that detects the user's browser and displays an appropriately formatted site.

Electronic Newsletters: Constant Contact & MailChimp

When I started seminary, I learned pretty quickly that congregational leaders have a lot

of pet peeves. One of the first I encountered was the hatred what we might call Sunday-centrism: “My parishioners love coming to church on Sunday morning, but that's the only contact we have with them all week! Jesus calls us to be disciples 24/7!”

Putting aside the fact that discipleship is not equivalent to church activity participation, I empathize with this complaint while also realizing that patterns of cultural participation are changing. The church no longer “owns” Sunday and Wednesday nights. Digital tools give us the opportunity to address Sunday-centrism with additional faith touches throughout the week, supporting our members on their journeys of faith even when they can't make it back to church. The most direct tool for these is a weekly email newsletter.

I join the chorus of voices shouting insistently that the reports of email's death have been greatly exaggerated. Don't be alarmed that the “open rates” (percentage of recipients who actually read your email) will probably hover in the 25–50% range. That's a higher percentage than will see most of your social media content (and you probably have more email contacts than social media followers). It's also probably a higher readership than your print newsletter ever got—it's just that electronic newsletters give us the data.

In any event, a good email newsletter will have a stable format: perhaps a reflection from clergy or other leaders, followed by a story of faith in action, a couple of activity announcements, and an online spiritual resource members might find useful. In her *Social Media Gospel*, Meredith Gould recommends a 25–150 word target for newsletter articles (99), though if you need to go longer you can always run an excerpt with a “read more” link. Just don't be surprised when you learn that an even smaller percentage of recipients will click the links. Still, your newsletter can be a valuable source of traffic for your website.

Remember that your online newsletter is one of your best evangelism tools. The parish I serve asks visitors “Would you like to receive

our email newsletter?” as a non-threatening invitation into deeper relationship. In fact, we sometimes have visitors return after a year or more and tell us an announcement in the online newsletter brought them back. Or perhaps they just saw the email and decided “it was time” to return to church. An email newsletter doesn’t let you off the hook for other kinds of follow-up, but it does provide an important point of ongoing contact.

The “best in class” email newsletter tools are both from the small- (and not-so-small-) business marketing world. [Constant Contact](#) is the easiest to use and starts at \$15 per month. [MailChimp](#) will be free for most churches and is more powerful but slightly more difficult to use. Again, I believe the right way to choose between the two is to consider the tech savvy of the staff or volunteers who will be producing the newsletter. The best tool for you is a tool you will actually use, and use effectively.

Facebook

There is a church in Texas that I may never visit. I have no connection with it, aside from trading a couple of tweets with its pastor. And yet, if I ever move to Austin, you can bet I’m making the twenty-minute drive to Manor each week to be a part of St. Mary Magdalene’s. I have no memory of how I learned about this church, but from the second I clicked on the photos tab on their [Facebook page](#), I have known it as a place where God’s Spirit is beautifully and abundantly at work.

After your website, your Facebook page is the next-most-important part of your online presence. Even more than your website, it is where you *show* rather than *tell*. Naughton and Wilson are fond of saying that social media is “where the people are” (43), and the largest numbers of them to hear and see your proclamation are on Facebook.

Of all the tech tools available for communications and evangelism, Facebook is probably the least intimidating. Anyone with a

Facebook account can be made a page administrator, and here especially it’s a good thing to have a team managing your page. That way you can respond quickly to comments, share the load of posting regularly (3–5 times per week if you can manage it, but at least a couple), and include perspectives from different areas of church life.

What should you post? Photos should be your top priority. Links to announcements or other content on your website will help drive traffic there. Links to other spiritual resources will help your members explore their faith and are likely to be shared. Posting questions can help start a conversation. And simple, attractive posts about events serve as great advertising—especially if you’re willing to pay \$15–50 dollars to “boost” these posts.

Boosting is important because, as we mentioned above, only a small percentage of the people who like your page will see any given piece of content. But a boosted post will be seen by most of your fans and many of *their* friends, who just happen to be the perfect people for your evangelism efforts to reach. For our recent pet blessing, a \$35 boost helped our parish reach 3,500 extra people, gain 11 new page likes, and start a great conversation about the event. Our reach would have been just 562 without the boost (Facebook calls this number the “organic” reach). And those 11 new page likes will slightly increase our organic and paid reach in future campaigns as well.

Besides boosting, there are lots of other ways to optimize your Facebook effectiveness. You can consult studies of the best time to post, about the best formats for different kinds of posts, and about how to increase engagement. But more than with any of the other tools, you’ll see steady results simply by getting in the game and doing your best to be consistently present.

Twitter

Twitter is not for everybody. Its learning curve is a lot steeper than Facebook’s. It’s full of jargon. Its tacit social etiquette is harder to get

one's head around. Fewer of your members are probably using it (though maybe not so few as you think). So why bother with Twitter? To participate in important conversations, and to reach out to reporters and to your neighborhood.

We've always known that faith leaders can make a big cultural impact by bringing their perspectives to bear on the questions of the day. But where pastors used to write letters to the editor and count on their credential to get the letter printed, Twitter has made it possible for all the faithful to speak up in the venue where everybody's talking.

I think this power fully clicked for me back in late May, when it became increasingly clear that Santa Barbara mass-shooting suspect Elliot Rodgers was frighteningly misogynistic. You may have heard about the #yesallwomen hashtag, the place where (mostly female) Twitter users went to share their experiences of fear and harassment in everyday life. "Yes, all women experience these dangers" was the message.

You might *not* have heard about a parallel conversation that sprung up: #yesallbiblicalwomen. This imaginative exercise in feminist theology let the women of the Bible get in on the #yesallwomen conversation. [Time Magazine took notice](#), helping plenty of non-faith-insiders hear the voices of passionate and creative people who want our religious reflection to be safe and welcoming for all persons. If we're worried that non-Christians see the church as sexist and backward, conversations like #yesallbiblicalwomen should be part of our response.

Next time big news breaks and you want to share your perspective as a disciple of Jesus Christ, consider contributing to the hashtag where people have gathered for reflection. And remember to be love mercy and walk humbly as you witness on behalf of gospel justice.

The other way to have an impact on Twitter is to find out where the conversations about your neighborhood are taking place. The parish I serve is in Washington DC's Foggy Bottom/West End district. And sure enough,

there's a #FoggyBottom hashtag in addition to the more generic #WashingtonDC one. Our Blessing of the Animals tweets (from the church's account and my personal account) seem to have done some good. We had reporters from the local campus newspaper as well as a Washington news radio station cover the event. I'm willing to bet that Twitter was where they heard about it. Next year we'll be sure to tag those outlets in some tweets, in the hope that they'll return to do another story.

Tool Profiles: Intriguing Possibilities

If you're active with all the tools we've covered, you've probably already reached what my friend Randall Curtis (aka "The Holy Geek") calls "social butterfly" status. But even if you're already flying well, there are some other tools on the horizon that may become normative in the church communications and evangelism arena. Let me zip through a few of them in closing.

Instagram

Marketers are already panicking that young people are abandoning Facebook at a pretty good clip. One of the places they're going is [Instagram](#). If you're already taking great photos and short videos for your Facebook page, why not extend your reach on this almost purely visual social network?

Pinterest

Pinterest is the powerhouse social network for sharing activities to do at home. While cooking and decorating rule this roost, the sharing of "faith at home" activities is really catching on, especially in communities that nurture it intentionally.

Google Plus

The social network that we can never quite feel comfortable ignoring is Google Plus. It's true that Google's Facebook competitor is much less popular. But a well-integrated Google Plus page may help your church's search engine rankings. If "churches in [your town]" is a competitive search, you may want to consider this route.

Meetup, etc.

Meetup.com is how many neighbors gather "to learn something, do something, share something." For \$12 per month, your church's social, service, or spirituality group can start a meetup that can be found by people in your area looking to get together. Other services at the intersection of neighborhoods and spirituality (or at least potentially there) include [FaithStreet](#) (a church locator) and [Nextdoor](#) (a neighborhood-based social network).

Bottom Line: Buy-in, Budget, Build

Wherever your congregation falls on the spectrum of digital communications savvy, there are steps you can take to improve your current outreach and stretch it into new territory. The tools we've discussed here are means to an end (recall Lytle's "message, method, *then* media"), so be sure to think about your goals early and often.

But even if you, the reader of this article, are ready to start building according to a strategic vision, remember that you almost certainly can't go it alone. It will take buy-in from clergy, other staff, and volunteers to help an effective communications program take root in most congregations. And the cost of using these tools well is manageable but significant—in implementation time if not necessarily in hosting and subscription fees.

Nevertheless, this is essential work if parishes expect to hold steady in membership and mission, let alone grow. Get your fellow leaders reading *Speaking Faithfully* or *The Social Media Gospel* (both quick reads) to help spread the vision. Perhaps even just sharing this article could help plant a seed.

That's what we're always doing as evangelists: planting seeds. So remember to spread them wantonly, like the God who casts them on good soil and bad (Matthew 13:1-9). Remember that growth is a slow process but that diligence and consistency are key to success. And remember that while we can plant and water, it is our God who will give the growth (1 Corinthians 3:7).

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Story and Christian Formation: Using Movies, Video, and Music with in Christian Formation

Shannon Kelly

Think about one of the most memorable movies/videos you have watched. What was it about? What made it powerful? In what ways did you connect with the characters and story? Whether silly or serious, movies/videos/videos have a way of making a connection with us. They tell us stories that transport us to a different place, time, culture, situation, or experience. They are stories that can also tell us more about faith, belief, doubt, struggle, journey, and ourselves.

As people of the Bible, we are people of story. Our faith has been passed down in the stories of the Bible and the stories of our traditions. We know about the struggle, joy, triumph, encounters, confusion, doubt, faith, prayers, and journey because of the stories we read in the Old and New Testaments as well as in the literature that has been found from those periods in history. Our foundation is built on story, the most epic story we know.

The stories woven through the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible are stories of people and their interaction with God, each other, and themselves. They are stories that still ring true today

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because they are our story, your story, my story.

Jesus taught in stories throughout his ministry. He taught people through parables, which are stories that appear to be simple, but are usually complex and multi-layered. Parables are used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Jesus also taught people by using the stories of the people he encountered, teaching them through their own experience and culture. Jesus' ministry was filled with the use of story as he taught, instructed, prayed, and engaged the people around him.

We are a people of story. We are drawn to story as a way of connection because it helps us find our experience in the experience of another. It helps us to know that someone else has similarly experienced our own struggles, joys, doubts, belief, encounters, and triumphs. We are drawn to story as a way of discovery and epiphany. Stories give us a way to learn and gain new insight. They allow us to escape to a different place, if even for a moment. They motivate us to do the big and small tasks in front of us. They engage us in a bigger and broader story than our own so we remember that the world is a place full of diverse problems, joys, struggles, and triumphs.

Today, movies, videos, and music that accompanies them serve a similar purpose. Movies, videos, and music can help us learn, escape, motivate, engage, and share our own experiences and the experiences of others around the world. They can be great resources of formation and education as they engage us in stories that are different than our own. They teach us by both opening us up to a wider world and showing us our own world.

Movies and video can...

- ◆ help the group engage with a topic on a different level
- ◆ inspire and motivate us to change injustices in the world
- ◆ teach history, culture, faith, struggle, etc. in a unique way
- ◆ open up a minefield of questions, concerns, and off topic issues if you don't prepare with care and

intentionality (Making sure you fully prepare will save you having to deal with parents and kids who are upset or confused about the movie/video.)

- ◆ teach kids and adults to think critically about what they see and hear in film and tie it to their faith journey
- ◆ give you the opportunity to talk about the power that music plays in the movie/video and in our lives

Learning Styles & the Use of Multimedia

As you think about ways in which you can use movies and video in your setting, remember that it's not just a fun and interesting activity, but that using multimedia speaks to many different kinds of learners. Learning styles influence how we receive experiences, what we remember about those experiences, the words we choose, and the way in which we learn best. Each learning style uses different parts of the brain, so when you engage in using multiple learning styles, more of the brain is involved which increases our memory and involvement.

There are seven recognized learning styles.

Visual—learns best through pictures, images, three-dimensional imaginings

Aural—learns best through sound and music

Verbal—learns best through the use of words in speaking and writing

Physical—learns best through the use of body, hands, and touch

Logical—learns best through the use of reasoning, logic and systems

Social—learn better in groups or with other people

Solitary—learns better when he or she works alone and does self-study.

You can see that the use of movies and video will engage many, if not all, these learning styles in various ways, such as:

- ◆ the presence of pictures, images, sound and music engages the visual and aural learners
- ◆ watching and processing in a group incorporates the social learners
- ◆ the quiet of a movie/video (if it is watched in quiet) can invite the solitary learners to escape into the movie/video and begin asking their own questions
- ◆ processing the movie/video afterward will engage the verbal learners
- ◆ questions and participating in debriefing a movie/video can invite the verbal and physical learners to delve into the conversation on a different level (Think about ways you can invite that kind of learning by acting out a scene, journal writing, and verbalizing questions and responses.)

Guide to Showing Movies & Videos

Watch the movie or video first.

- ✓ Watch *all* of it. Missing even a scene or not watching it until the end can lead you to miss a scene, word, or phrase that can catch people off guard and ruin the experience you are trying to create.
- ✓ If you can, invite other adult leaders to view it with you. Process it together after the movie or video.
- ✓ As you watch, think about your context and its culture.
- ✓ Write down your own questions, thoughts, and concerns. What were your favorite parts? What were the troubling parts? What did you have questions about?
- ✓ What does this movie or video say about our story as Christians, faith, and doubt?
- ✓ Does it echo any of the stories in the Bible? Beliefs of your faith tradition?
- ✓ Think about follow up questions you will ask when you are processing this

with your group. (see section below with post-movie questions)

- ✓ What will this movie or video say to your group?
- ✓ Is there a scene, phrase, or word that your group won't be able to get past because it is too provocative?
- ✓ Is there a scene, phrase, or word that may bring about a moment of clarity?

Ask others who have seen it.

- ✓ After you have seen it, use your network, colleagues, or friends as research partners.
- ✓ What did they think of the video or movie?
- ✓ Would they show it to a group like yours?
- ✓ If you are a part of a social media group, this might be a great place to post your question about the movie or video in question.

How to Use Movies/Videos in Your Ministry

If you want to use movies and videos in your ministry, make sure you have a plan and have done the work ahead of time to make it successful. If you are going to the movie theater, make sure you have a certain number of "scholarship tickets" for those who can't afford to come. Make sure you also have space set up to talk about it afterward (not next week, but right afterward when it is fresh.) If you are showing the movie/video on your own, make sure you get the proper permissions (see the section below that addresses this) and that you have the proper equipment you need to show it and have it be heard well.

Know your audience.

When selecting a movie/video keep certain things in mind such as age range, culture, experience, old references that you may have to explain, etc. Keeping your audience in mind will help you choose the right movie/video.

Think strategically.

Think strategically about when you want to show movies/videos throughout the year. You don't want to overuse the multimedia, nor do you want to ignore it. It makes sense to use a movie when you will be together for longer than three hours. It makes sense to show short videos or clips from a movie when you will be together a shorter amount of time.

Communicate with parents.

Let the parents know you will be watching a movie and how it fits into the curriculum and scope of what you are trying to do. If at all possible, send some reflection questions home with them so they can further the conversation at home.

Question & Response Time

I use the words "question and response" here intentionally because there is not one answer for any of the questions. When watching a movie or video each person will have a different experience. By asking questions, you are inviting response and dialogue, not the correct answer.

Before you sit to watch a particular movie or video with your group, make sure you have a few sets of questions ready to go. The first set will be general discussion, the second will be more in-depth, the third will be more pointed questions. You can do the question and response time in the large group or small groups.

Before you begin your question and response time, you will want to set up some ground rules. Remind the group that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion even if it is different than your own. That we may disagree and when we do, it invites us into a deeper listening to the other rather than trying to prove your point is correct. Have fun and enjoy the dialogue.

General Questions

- ✓ I wonder what your favorite part of the movie/video was? Why?
- ✓ I wonder what your least favorite part of the movie/video was? Why?
- ✓ What were the things you did not understand or that confused you?
- ✓ What do you think the message of this movie/video is?
- ✓ What themes do you see present in this movie/video?
- ✓ Are any of these themes similar to themes we would see in the Bible or in our religious tradition?
- ✓ What do you think the filmmaker was trying to tell us? Did they accomplish this?
- ✓ What did you learn from this movie/video?
- ✓ I wonder what an important moment was for you in the movie/video? Was there a moment where you had an aha or gained some deeper knowledge?
- ✓ Did the conflict in the movie/video enhance the story? I wonder what we learn from conflict? I wonder how people in the Bible dealt with conflict?

More In-Depth Questions

- ✓ I wonder who your favorite character was? Why?
- ✓ I wonder who your least favorite character was? Why?
- ✓ If you could ask anyone in the movie/video a question, what would it be?
- ✓ How are the characters like people that you know?
- ✓ Were there instances when they made you think of people in the Bible?
- ✓ Did you see similarities in this story and any story you know in the Bible?
- ✓ Is this story a parable? Is it a moral story? Why?

Pointed Questions

- ✓ How did the music enrich the movie/video? Were there lyrics that stood out for you?

- ✓ What does this movie/video say about our experience as humans today?
- ✓ What symbols did you see present in this movie/video? How did they enhance the story? Did you notice they were there? (Symbols in movies and video are used often as a simple way of pointing to something else. Such symbols include things like the cross, the sun, a nation's flag, a star, an animal, the season of the year, etc.)
- ✓ If you did not notice symbols, might the movie/video be different if you watched it with that in mind?
- ✓ In this movie/video, what are the issues it presents that are most relevant to your story? To the stories in the Bible? To the stories in your community?
- ✓ Are there any life lessons you will take away with you after watching this movie/video?
- ✓ Which character do you admire the most?
- ✓ How might you imagine God reacting to this movie/video?

Resources

Permission to Show Movies

- ✓ Permission from parents: make sure the parents know what movie/video you are

showing, the time of the showing, and that there will be follow up discussion. Tell them why you are showing a movie/video and having a discussion so they know it's not a "blow off night" and that it has a purpose.

- ✓ Show the movie/video with in the copyright guidelines. Here is a helpful resource on using music and media materials. (http://leaderresources.org/sites/default/files/Brochures/LR_Copyright_Guidelines_010711.pdf)

Movie and Video Directories

There are many movie/video directories or indexes on the Internet, Here are some that I find helpful.

- ✓ The Text this Week: This is a great resource for the lectionary, scripture study, worship links, and resources. One of my favorite resources is the Movie Index that is sorted by Title and by Theme. (<http://www.textweek.com/movies/movies.htm>)
- ✓ TED Talks (<http://www.ted.com>)
- ✓ Soul Pancake (<http://soulpancake.com>)
- ✓ Kid President (<http://kidpresident.com>)
- ✓ Youth Specialties (<http://youthspecialties.com/articles/category/movie-study-guides>)



Down from the Mountaintop: Sustaining the Church Camp Experience at Home

Marlene Bogard

Ahhh, the camp after-glow. There may be sand in the suitcase and bug-bites on the leg, but the glow your campers catch may be akin to what Moses experienced when he returned from the mountain top in Exodus 34, vs. 29 (and I am not talking about a sunburn). Moses had a genuine experience with God!

The summer Christian camp experience invites children and youth to also experience God in a way that is vastly different than the daily routines of life at home and school. There may not be a burning bush, but there might be revelations of God in dragonflies and star-filled skies. God may speak to campers as they float down a river in a raft, or in the sweaty smiles of grace-filled counselors. Hearts may be warmed by the Spirit during campfire singing or while savoring a pink and purple sunset. Invitations to follow in the steps of Jesus are repeated in daily scripture study and on woody trails. In all these ways and more, a summer camp experience is a real-time faith formation laboratory.

How exactly does this happen? What is so amazing about the camp experience?

From dawn to dusk, campers are reminded that God is creator, that God is present and available for relationship. Throughout the week, there are constant reminders that God is love and that camp is a place to live out that love in community with others. From morning praise to campfire embers, songs are sung about Jesus and campers are invited to embrace and own the Christian life. Theology is talked about and practiced in a myriad of age-appropriate applications. It is no accident that many children and youth remember that some of their first meaningful experiences with God happened at camp.

There is a saturation of intentional religious language, a pausing for prayer and day-long examples of lived faith. Prayers of thanksgiving prior to mealtime maybe sung

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with jazzy tunes or a rap, but the action speaks: we are grateful to God for our food. A skit about understanding the meaning of God's grace, performed by college-age summer staff is much more memorable (and fun) than learning about a religious doctrine in a church classroom. Plus, the kids can practice being grace-full to each other as they play games and live with each other in close proximity.

The staff and counselors are energetic, positive and lovingly goofy. They show up at camp in these leadership roles because they love kids and they love God, a blessed combination.

The adults are available at all times to ensure that the campers are safe, supported and nurtured. Staff are trained in how to manage boundaries with campers, mediate conflicts and how to talk about their own faith with children and youth.

Music can be both crazy and contemplative with movement and lots of smiles. Kid-friendly music may include old folksy tunes as well as songs with nature themes, and praise and worship songs. Variety happens naturally and is welcomed.

Nature is honored and respected, and the elements of light, dark, fire, water, air and earth are built into the implicit curriculum of the week. Campers experience the delights and the pitfalls of the environment around them – from sand and trees to ticks and poison ivy. This immersion into the natural world teaches wisdom and awareness of a precious and delicate world, God's world.

There are meaningful rituals to mark the beginning and ending of days and mealtimes. Often it is heard, "That's how we do it at camp!"

The Faith Shaping Power of Summer Camp Experiences

As congregational leaders, we need to sit up and take notice of the enormous faith-shaping power of the summer camp experience. It may serve us well to *remember and replicate* that

which happens so naturally at camp in our congregations and in our homes. There are innumerable reasons why camp feels like a mountain top experience. But there are also reasons why the "after-camp glow" is hard to maintain. With no additional nurture, "this little light of mine" may become a stubby candle with a faulty wick.

Often in the last decade I have read statistics describing the powerful partnership of congregation and home in nurturing Christian faith in children and youth. Parents remain the number one influence in children's lives regarding faith development. Pastors and congregations have the opportunity to support parents in their roles as faith formation specialists. However, I would like to add a third partner—the Christian camp. Depending on many factors (denomination or faith tradition, geography, cost, relationships), some churches may or may not have strong ties to a particular Christian camp. This may limit their awareness of and familiarity with a camp's theology, program, staff and more. But for some congregations, there are almost familial-like relationships that exist.

Keeping the Faith Formation Embers Glowing in the Community

Ideas for Pastors and Church Leaders

- ◆ Maximize the relationship between congregation and camp.
- ◆ Mine the camp's website. Acquaint yourself with their mission, purpose and theological stance. Read about events, programming, see photos and highlights.
- ◆ Build relationships with staff. Invite the camp director to your church to provide a sermon, "mission moment" or promote the camp.
- ◆ Visit the camp. Spend some time wandering the grounds, seeing the environment, chatting with staff, hearing stories of how their lives intertwine with campers.
- ◆ Volunteer for the camp. Offer your time as a Bible study leader or resource person.

Bring a team of folks to a camp clean-up day.

- ◆ Use social media. Join a camp Facebook group, check their Twitter account.
- ◆ Promote the Christian camp experience. Include stories and testimonies of campers in Sunday worship or your church newsletter. Post promotional materials in accessible places. Make sure that newer attendees to your congregation are aware of camp opportunities.
- ◆ Provide camp scholarships. Some churches provide partial or whole scholarships to every camper as a way of underscoring the importance of this faith formation opportunity.
- ◆ Designate a camp-congregation advocate. This person would serve as the main link between church and camp, staying in contact with camp, receiving and distributing digital and printed resources to camper families.
- ◆ Financially support camp through your budget, special offerings or fundraisers.
- ◆ Have a whole-church retreat at the camp, with activities for all ages and abilities. Involve youth and children in planning and leading the activities.

Ideas for Parents

- ◆ Host a campfire in your back yard or around your grill. Toast marshmallows and ask your kids to lead "camp songs." Invite other family members and neighbors.
- ◆ Host a neighborhood talent or skit night. Serve popcorn!
- ◆ Take a risk and invite other families over for Bible study or prayer. Since it is intergenerational, it will be relaxed and even fun!
- ◆ Together, write a (real paper) letter to your kid's camp director, the cooks, bible study leader or counselors. Express appreciation for the time they spent with your kids and fill them in on what is happening in your family today.
- ◆ Invite friends from camp (from other churches/towns) to a get-together. Support these friendships—they may be lifelong!

- ◆ Cook a favorite meal from camp such as foil dinners, wiener roast or walking tacos.
- ◆ Have family announcements after a meal. (Crazy is optional).
- ◆ Sleep in a camper, tent or under the stars!
- ◆ Discover the wildlife in your yard or a nearby park. Look up the critters in a book (think library!) or go to the web to read about what they need to thrive.
- ◆ Have a backyard water fight!
- ◆ Go fishing!
- ◆ Find a river, lake or waterpark and play together!
- ◆ Ask your child to teach you a craft they made at camp.
- ◆ Ask your child to teach you some songs and actions they learned at camp.
- ◆ Turn off your home air conditioning and live like they do at camp!
- ◆ Wake them up with a crazy good mornin' song!
- ◆ Do a technology free day (no phone / internet, TV, computer, or electronic games)—just like at camp!
- ◆ Sing a "camp" grace before your meal. The kids know the words! Have fun at your meals! Invite kids to plan a meal-time activity.
- ◆ Talk about the best thing that happened at camp and the worst thing that happened at camp.
- ◆ Ask your child about their life with God. Was their faith changed or challenged during camp? How did they experience God's love in a new way? Was a significant decision made?
- ◆ Continue or begin to do daily or weekly family devotions together. Take turns with all members of the family leading, reading, and praying. Use the scripture that was studied at camp.
- ◆ Ask only a few questions every day. Allow them to share experiences with you over time.
- ◆ Pray together as a family, thanking God for the experience of Christian camp, the friendships and the challenges.

- ◆ Share with your children your own faith story. Be honest about your questions and challenges.
- ◆ Attend a family camp together.
- ◆ Have a quiet time outdoors before bed, star-gazing, listening to nature sounds or a short walk.

The Impact of a Camp Experience

Melinda was introduced to the Christian camping experience at 10 years-old. Her congregation supported her attendance by providing a scholarship that paid half of the week's fee. On the Sunday morning worship service, before her parents drove her to camp, she was invited, along with others going to camp to come to the front of church during worship and receive her scholarship check. But the congregational support did not end there. The deacon who presented the check, placed his hands on her shoulder and offered a blessing. The pastor joined in with a prayer for God to move mightily in her life while she was at camp. Her parents and other adults stood to say they would pray for her daily. Two days later her Sunday school teacher sent a colorful card to her at the camp via snail mail.

During the week Melinda met lots of girls from lots of other communities. She soon realized that others had different ideas about life and relationships. Some of them even talked "funny." She learned about Jesus each day during Bible Study. Her cabin participated in an outpost experience where they carried water, food and bedding to a remote location and set up their own camp in the wilderness. She sang new songs about God and faith, ate lots of vegetables and even twisted her ankle during recreation. She learned that you can pray and talk to God anywhere, anytime, and not just before meals. She discovered that at camp, boys really smell and don't shower as much as girls. She learned that she could tie five kinds of knots and paddle a canoe. At the end of every day, after cabin devotions with

her camp counselor and popcorn style prayers from everyone in the cabin, Melinda rested well.

Melinda returned to the same camp during high school. It was a vastly different experience, as she had begun to have questions about the faith and values she had been taught. New friendships began and others were left behind. She opened up to her counselor and had long conversations about following Jesus in real life, after camp. She discovered that camp was meaningful because it was a place where "I can be myself and no one judges me."

When Melinda was 18, she counseled 5th grade girls for one week at the same camp. One of the campers was a child with developmental delays. Melinda confessed, "I had never seen so many adults show so much love to one person." The modeling of Christian love in action was amazing and propelled her to re-examine her own life direction. "I found out that camp is not a place for perfect kids and most don't come from perfect homes but it is a perfect place to demonstrate Christian love and community."

At age 20, Melinda joined the summer staff at the same camp. She hung-out with kids, encouraged them, prayed with them, shared her faith with them and listened to their stories.

At age 22, Melinda is now an intern as an elementary school social worker. She says, "It was at camp that I realized that I wanted to work with kids that struggled. As a camp counselor I did not have as much influence as I wanted. I could listen to them for one week, but they had to go back home. As a school social worker, I can take a whole-family approach to making their world a better place. Being part of a Christian camp, I realized for the first time how important one person can be in someone's life. I want to have a sense that in my work I can help even one person and that their life is moving in a better direction."