WHAT IF. . .
Imagining Possibilities

Learning from Faith Formation during the Pandemic: Reflection and Evaluation
John Roberto

In the midst of the disruption, loss, pain, and stress of this pandemic, pastors and faith formation leaders have been learning a lot by listening attentively to the needs of their people and responding creatively with new approaches to faith formation. Leaders have done amazingly creative work in faith formation, reaching and engaging people of all ages with tools and methods and media they never imagined using way back in 2019.

There's much to be learned from your pandemic creativity and innovations. Many of the new approaches you launched—at home faith formation, digital methods and media, online learning, to name a few—can become permanent features of faith formation in your church for years to come.

Now is a good time to reflect and evaluate while everyone's experience is still fresh. This is the time to capture your personal learning and engage all those participating in faith formation in sharing their stories and experiences. This article presents three types of evaluation: Personal, Team, and Participant. I have created worksheets for each of the three types of evaluation presented in the article. They can be found in the Appendix. Adapt the questions and worksheets for your context and purposes.

Personal Learning

The first type of reflection and evaluation is personal. Take some personal time to process your experience of the pandemic and the ways you responded to the needs of people in your community. Select questions from the list below that can help you name your experience and identify your learning during the pandemic. You may want to start a journal to record your reflections.

Lawrence Peers in his article "Showing Up" offers these questions for reflection:

1. How would you describe your own personal experiences of doing ministry during this time?
2. Are some emotions more welcome than others—within you? among your colleagues? with members in your church community?
3. What strengths are you relying on?
4. What are your disappointments? What are your concerns?
5. What is wanting to emerge in your life and ministry that you may only have a slight glimpse of right now?

Team Learning

The second type of reflection and evaluation is with your leadership team. You can send your team questions to prepare, conduct a Zoom meeting and record the results, and then review the results and prepare a report. Zoom creates a video and audio version of your meeting. You can use the audio version to transcribe the meeting into your report. According to Zoom,

> Audio transcription automatically transcribes the audio of a meeting or webinar that you record to the cloud. After this transcript is processed, it appears as a separate VTT file in the list of recorded meetings. The transcript is divided into sections, each with a timestamp that shows how far into the recording that portion of the text was recorded. You can edit the text to more accurately capture the words, or to add capitalization and punctuation, which are not captured by the transcript.

First, a simple way to evaluate the year is to conduct a **Four-Quadrant Evaluation**. Invite the team to reflect on the experience of leading faith formation during the pandemic.

Quadrant 1. The upper left quadrant is for identifying what the participants in faith formation (children, teens, adults, and/or families) found beneficial and what really engaged them.

Quadrant 2. The upper right is for what your team wants to celebrate. What you did you accomplish since the pandemic began?

Quadrant 3. The bottom left is for ideas to build on the bright spots from the past year.

Quadrant 4. The bottom right is for what would you like to improve or give greater attention to as you plan faith formation in the 2021-22 year.

#1. What did people (children, youth, adults, and/or families) find beneficial in faith formation this year? What really engaged them?	**#2.** What do we want to celebrate? What accomplishments do we want to lift up?
#3. What are the bright spots that we want to build on as we plan for next year?	**#4.** What do we want to improve or give greater attention to as we plan faith formation in the 2021-22 year.

Second, you can evaluate the year using "**10 Questions to Ask Now**" by Susan Beaumont. She organizes her questions into three categories: what have we lost, what did we assume, and what wants to emerge. You can select one or more questions in each category for your team evaluation session.

What Have We Lost?

All significant transitions begin with an ending. Something must come to an end before we can explore a new beginning. Most of us resist endings, accompanied as they are by loss. We gloss over the painful work of grief to move onto action, which feels more productive.

1. What were we on the verge of discovering or accomplishing before the onset of the pandemic? What needs to move forward in different ways now?
2. What was possible before that may not be possible for some time—if ever?
3. What seemed important before that feels superfluous now?

What Did We Assume?

Many of our old assumptions no longer hold true. If we do not acknowledge the truth of this, we will make decisions that are inappropriate for the next season. We need good questions to unfreeze some of our old assumptions and expand our consciousness.

4. What was undervalued before that may hold greater value now?
5. What mattered about geography before that no longer matters?
6. What margin or lack of margin was built into our old model of doing church? What new abundance are we experiencing now? Where are we experiencing scarcity now that was not evident before?

What Wants to Emerge?

When we ask better questions, we invite innovation into the new order. We can be led by the future itself into something fresh and exciting. We begin noticing what wants to emerge through us.

7. What is our greatest asset now?
8. What relationships will we need to build on or strengthen in the months ahead?
9. What unique role might our congregation play in local, national, and even global recovery?
10. What long term changes in the bigger picture would we like to be part of bringing to fruition?

These questions are not meant to be magic bullets that solve problems. The questions are merely an invitation to pay exquisite attention—to notice why we are making the choices we make, and what wants to happen next. The dialogue that these questions provoke can make the difference between merely surviving this season and thriving in the next.

Third, you can use the six questions below to prepare for planning the 2021-22 program year. They are adapted for faith formation from: "**Church Re-entry Roadmap: Creating a Plan for Your Ministry**" developed by Ministry Spark (from David C Cook). (You can download the entire Roadmap for free from: https://ministryspark.com/resources/covid-19-church-re-entry-roadmap.)

1. Make a list of what worked and didn't work in faith formation pre-COVID with age groups, families, and all ages together.

   - What were you doing in physical settings?
   - What were you doing in online settings?
   - What were you doing in hybrid settings that blended physical and online?

2. Write down your vision and goals for faith formation and make sure your new plan for faith formation is focusing around that vision and goals.

3. Think through what worked and didn't work during COVID.

   - What worked or didn't work in faith formation in online-only settings?
   - What worked or didn't work in faith formation in physical settings?
   - What worked or didn't work in faith formation in hybrid settings?
   - What works for both a physical and digital setting?
   - What did you start that you want to continue?

4. Identify what you have learned from the challenges you faced and are facing?

5. Identify the new opportunities that are now present to you and your church?

6. Make a list of the ways that you are innovating. Then identify ways that you can continue innovating in 2021-2022. What areas (challenges, opportunities) are ripe for innovation?
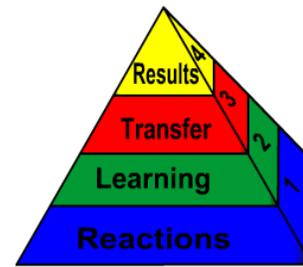
Participant Learning

The third type of reflection and evaluation is participant feedback. There are four levels in evaluating a program's effectiveness.

1. **Reaction:** How do participants react to the program, or better, what is the measure of their satisfaction?
2. **Learning:** To what extent has learning occurred?
3. **Transfer:** To what extent has behavior changed as a result of the program?
4. **Results:** To what extent have the results occurred because of the program?

Donald Kirkpatrick in *Evaluating Training Programs* identified these four levels and symbolized them as a pyramid. While it is not easy in most faith formation programming to get feedback on the results of our programming, we can find ways to invite people to share their reactions, learning, and new behaviors

Kirkpatrick's Four
Levels of Evaluation

Transfer or behavior change is the most difficult to measure. We need to find out if the participants are applying what they are learning to their lives. Measuring behavior change is necessary, not only to see if behavior has changed, but also to determine the reasons why change has not occurred.

Here is a brief overview of the four levels of evaluation.

Level 1: Reaction
(Immediately at the conclusion of a program or activity.)

How do participants react to the program, or better, what is the measure of their satisfaction?
1. Determine what you want to find out.
2. Design a form or process that will quantify reactions.
3. Encourage written comments and suggestions.
4. Get honest responses.

Level 2: Learning
(Within a short time after the conclusion of a program or activity)

To what extent has learning occurred: understanding, practice, attitudes?
1. Evaluate knowledge, practices, and/or attitudes before and after the program.
2. Measure knowledge, practices, and attitudes.
3. If practical, use a control group that did not participate in the program to compare with the group that participated.

Level 3: Transfer
(Ideally before the program begins and then at a later time so people can integrate their learning into their lives.)

To what extent has behavior changed as a result of the program?
1. If possible, evaluate before and after the program. It is usually impossible to do this, so it becomes necessary to do it after the program and determine what the participant is doing differently than he or she was doing before the program.
2. Allow time for the behavior to change.

Level 4: Results
(Ideally before the program begins and then at a regular intervals to see how people are living their learning.)

> *To what extent have results occurred because of the program?*
> 1. Measure both before and after the program.
> 2. Allow time for possible results to be achieved.
> 3. Repeat the measurement at appropriate times.
> 4. Use a control group if practical.

The Appendix has sample evaluation tools for Levels 1-3 of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model.

Methods and Tools for Evaluating Participant Learning

An evaluation tool can be as simple as two questions—"What benefited you?" and "What could we do to improve the experience?"—given at the conclusion of a program or activity. At a gathered event people can receive a file card and write a response to each question on each side of the card. For a non-gathered program or activity (online, at home) you can use a form on your website or a Google Form or an email with the two questions.

The method that you use needs to match the tool and the questions you are asking. For example to evaluate a season or a year of programming you will want something more structured. Creating an evaluation form on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) gives you a way to ask multiple questions (structured and open-ended), invite people to complete the survey, and then have SurveyMonkey compile the results into a report for everyone to review and analyze. You can send participants an email or text with the survey link (URL) or post the link on your website. You can also use Google Forms (www.google.com/forms/about) to create a similar type of online evaluation. When creating a survey, try to limit the number of essay questions. People prefer the multiple choice/rating scales.

The evaluation tools presented in the Appendix can be used with a variety of methods. Briefly, some of the more popular methods for conducting an evaluation include:

- Conducting interviews with selected participants
- Conducting focus groups of 8-10 participants
- Designing and disseminating a survey with structured-response evaluation questions and open-ended questions using Survey Monkey (https://www.surveymonkey.com) or Google Forms (www.google.com/forms/about)
- Conducting a poll or survey on Facebook or conducting a chat on Facebook at a set time to solicit feedback
- Inviting people to upload a photo or story to Facebook or Instagram describing the experience of participating in the program or describing what they learned

- Inviting people to create a video describing their experience, using a couple of prepared questions, and then posting the videos to your church's YouTube channel and/or uploading them to your church website

The Research Guide that accompanies this article describes how to conduct interviews and focus groups, and then process the results. Go the Lifelong Faith website and the What If menu: https://www.lifelongfaith.com/what-if.html.

Tools in the Appendix
1. Personal Learning: 5 Questions
2. Team Learning: Four-Quadrant Evaluation
3. Team Learning: 10 Questions to Ask Now
4. Team Learning: Creating a Roadmap for Planning
5. Participant Learning: Questionnaire Level (1 Evaluation)
6. Participant Learning: Unfinished Sentences (Level 1 or 2 Evaluation)
7. Participant Learning: Questionnaire (Level 2 Evaluation)
8. Participant Learning: Reflection & Application Questions (Level 2 Reaction Evaluation)
9. Participant Learning: Application Tools (Level 3 Evaluation)

Works Cited

Beaumont, Susan. "10 Questions to Ask Now." Congregational Consulting, June 1, 2020. (Accessed at https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/10-questions-to-ask-now)

"Church Re-entry Roadmap: Creating a Plan for Your Ministry." Published by David C Cook, 2020. (Accessed at: https://ministryspark.com/resources/covid-19-church-re-entry-roadmap)

Kirkpatrick, Donald L. *Evaluating Training Programs*. Berrett-Koehler, 1998.

Peers, Lawrence. "Showing Up." Congregational Consulting, September 25, 2020. (Accessed at: https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/showing-up)

Personal Learning

1. **How would you describe your own personal experiences of doing ministry during this time?**

2. **Are some emotions more welcome than others—within you? among your colleagues? with members in your church community?**

3. **What strengths are you relying on?**

4. **What are your disappointments? What are your concerns?**

5. **What is wanting to emerge in your life and ministry that you may only have a slight glimpse of right now?**

Team Learning

Four-Quadrant Evaluation

Quadrant 1. What did people (children, youth, adults, and/or families) find beneficial in faith formation this year? What really engaged them?

Quadrant 2. What do we want to celebrate? What accomplishments do we want to lift up?

Quadrant 3. What are the bright spots that we want to build on as we plan for next year?

Quadrant 4. What do we want to improve or give greater attention to as we plan faith formation in the 2021-22 year.

Quadrant 1	Quadrant 2
Quadrant 3	**Quadrant 4**

Team Learning

10 Questions to Ask Now
(Questions created by Susan Beaumont)

What Have We Lost?
All significant transitions begin with an ending. Something must come to an end before we can explore a new beginning. Most of us resist endings, accompanied as they are by loss. We gloss over the painful work of grief to move onto action, which feels more productive.

- What were we on the verge of discovering or accomplishing before the onset of the pandemic? What needs to move forward in different ways now?
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What Wants to Emerge?
When we ask better questions, we invite innovation into the new order. We can be led by the future itself into something fresh and exciting. We begin noticing what wants to emerge through us.

- What is our greatest asset now?
- What relationships will we need to build on or strengthen in the months ahead?
- What unique role might our congregation play in local, national, and even global recovery?
- What long term changes in the bigger picture would we like to be part of bringing to fruition?

Team Learning

Creating a Roadmap for Planning
(Adapted from "Church Re-entry Roadmap: Creating a Plan for Your Ministry")

1. Make a list of what worked and didn't work in faith formation pre-COVID with age groups, families, and all ages together.

   - What were you doing in physical settings?
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2. Write down your vision and goals for faith formation and make sure your new plan for faith formation is focusing around that vision and goals.

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4. Identify what you have learned from the challenges you faced and are facing?

5. Identify the new opportunities that are now present to you and your church?

6. Make a list of the ways that you are innovating. Then identify ways that you can continue innovating in 2021-2022. What areas (challenges, opportunities) are ripe for innovation?

Participant Learning

Questionnaire (Level 1. Reaction Evaluation)
Select and adapt questions for your program(s) or activity(s).

1. What is your overall feeling after participating in this session? (Circle all that apply.)
    Enthused   Astounded   Satisfied   Indifferent   Ambivalent   Encouraged   Uneasy Threatened   Discouraged   Affirmed   Challenged   Enriched

2. I feel that this program was... (circle one)
    very helpful   somewhat helpful   not very helpful   not at all helpful

3. One thing I found most helpful during this program…

4. One of the biggest benefits from participating in the program…

5. One way I can use what I learned or experienced in my life…

6. One concrete suggestion for improving this program…

7. I was pleased by/with…

8. I was disappointed by/with…

9. Circle the number that best represents your evaluation of the program.
    (Use a rating scale from 1-5 with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.)
    *   I feel that I will be able to use what I learned.
    *   The program/activity was interesting and engaging.
    *   The program/activity encouraged participation, questions, and practical application.
    *   The program/activity utilized my experience effectively as a resource for learning.
    *   The program environment was characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences.
    *   The program/activity offered a variety of learning activities and ways to learn.
    *   The program/activity helped me apply my learning to daily life.
    *   The schedule and length of the program/activity was appropriate.
    *   (Add specific features and content of the program/activity for people to evaluate.)

10. Please rate the environment or physical facilities...
    ☐ Fine   ☐ Good   ☐ Okay   ☐ Poor

11. Please rate the length of the program...
    ☐ Fine   ☐ Good   ☐ Okay   ☐ Poor

12. Please rate the scheduling (time, day, month) of the program...
    ☐ Fine   ☐ Good   ☐ Okay   ☐ Poor

13. How did you find out about the program?

14. Why did you decide to participate in this program?

Unfinished Sentences (Level 1. Reaction or 2. Learning Evaluation)

Select and adapt questions for your program(s) or activity(s).

- *I learned…*

- *I discovered…*

- *I was surprised…*

- *I was moved by…*

- *I felt…*

- *I wonder about…*

- *I need to know more about…*

- *I was reminded that…*

- *I'm excited by…*

- *I'm challenged by… or challenged to…*

- *I need to remember… or remember to…*

Questionnaire (Level 2. Learning Evaluation)
Select and adapt questions for your program(s) or activity(s).

1. What understandings, practices, and attitudes do you have now that you did not have at the beginning of the program?

2. Identify several ways you can incorporate your learning into your daily life.

3. As a result of your learning in the program, how would you rate your current level of understanding and practice in the following areas?
   (*List the topics in the program and ask people to rate them from 1-5 with 1=low level, 5=high level.*)

4. Please rate the quality of each of the program topics or sessions.
   (*List the topics or sessions in the program and ask people to rate them from 1-4 with 1=poor, 2=adequate, 3=good, 4=very good.*)

5. Please identify the topics/sessions that were the most enjoyable/enriching and/or beneficial to you and give a brief explanation why?

   Session/Topic   Comments

6. What recommendations would you make for improving the program?

7. What understandings, practices, and attitudes do you have now that you did not have at the beginning of the program?

Reflection & Application Questions (Level 2. Learning Evaluation)
Select and adapt questions for your program(s) or activity(s).

Sample Reflection Questions

To reflect on what you have learned, identify the insights you have gained and the potential application to your life.

- Insights (What I've Learned)

- Applications (How I'll Use What I've Learned)

- Questions (What I Need to Learn or Explore Further)

Sample Application Questions

To what extent has learning occurred? This includes understanding the content presented, changing attitudes, developing behaviors, and so forth.

1. One way I can personally use what I learned from my participation in this program/activity is . . .

2. One way this program/activity had an impact on my life . . .

3. What understandings, skills, tools, or ideas do you have now that you did not have at the beginning of the program/activity?

4. List three actions you would like to undertake as a result of your participation in the program/activity.

5. As a result of your participation in this program/activity, what do you want to learn or do next?

Application Tools (Level 3. Behavior)

Conduct the activity at the conclusion of the program and then follow-up several weeks or a month later to explore how people are living their application ideas.

Application Tool #1. Integrating Learning

- Identify several ways you can incorporate your learning from the program into your life.

- As a result of your learning, what do you want to learn next?

- As a result of your learning in the program, how have you integrated the following knowledge, practices, and attitudes into your life.
  (*List the topics or knowledge/practices/attitudes and create a rating scale, for example, rating from 1-5 how you've integrated (or applied) the knowledge/ practices/attitudes into your daily life with 1=limited and 5=extensive.*)

Application Tool #2. Action Plan

1. List three actions you would like to undertake as a result of your participation in the preparation and event.
2. Choose the action that you would like to plan to do first and enter it.
3. List the potential roadblocks to implementing this action.
4. Discuss with another person how you might overcome these roadblocks.
5. Describe in detail the action you will undertake and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

   A shorter version of an action plan uses a three-column format:

Actions	Potential Roadblocks	First Steps
List several actions that you can begin living right now.	*List potential roadblocks to implementing your actions.*	*Name the first steps you need to take to accomplish the action.*

Application Tool #3. New Practices

1. I want to use _____ (practice) in this situation: _____

2. The roadblocks that could get in the way: _____

3. Sample script or plan for using the skill: _____

4. I will make my first attempt by (date): _____

Application Tool #4. A "To Do" List

Create a tool designed as a "to do" list that helps people identify the new practices for living what they learned from participation in a program. Begin the "to do" list with:

Remember to…

#1

#2

#3

#4

#5