



Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

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The Future of Adult Faith Formation



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Winter 2016 - Volume 9.2 A Guide for Envisioning the Future of Adult Faith Formation

The Report from the National Symposium

October 1-3, 2015

Sponsored by LifelongFaith Associates

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From October 1-3, 2015 over 100 faith formation leaders from across the U.S. and Canada gathered in Connecticut to explore the future of adult faith formation at a symposium convened by LifelongFaith Associates. The participants were guided through a scenario planning process to create four scenarios for the future of adult faith formation in congregations and to design strategies for using the scenarios to design new initiatives and projects in adult faith formation.

This **Guide** introduces the four scenarios and provides tools for using the scenarios in designing adult faith formation in congregations, designing programs and resources, conducting workshops, and training leaders for adult faith formation. The **Guide** is organized into the following sections:

1. Introducing Scenario Planning
 2. The Focusing Question for the Adult Faith Formation Scenarios
 3. Driving Forces Influencing Adult Faith Formation
 4. Critical Uncertainties Affecting the Future of Adult Faith Formation
 5. Four Scenarios for the Future of Adult Faith Formation
 6. Strategies for Creatively Responding to the Four Adult Faith Formation Scenarios
- Appendix 1. Driving Forces Affecting Adult Faith Formation
Appendix 2. Key Characteristics of the Seasons of Adulthood
Appendix 3. Critical Uncertainties Facing the Future of Adult Faith Formation
Appendix 4. Three Essential Practices for 21st Century Adult Faith Formation
Appendix 5. Strategies for Adult Faith Formation



LifelongFaith Associates

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What could adult faith formation look like in the twenty-first century? What insights and practices should inform and guide the development of adult faith formation for the four stages of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults? How do we engage all the seasons of an adult’s life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today’s world. How can we reach *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community?

The **2015 National Symposium on the Future of Adult Faith** engaged over 100 Christian faith formation leaders in analyzing the forces affecting the lives of adults and faith communities today, envisioning potential *futures* for adult faith based on current realities and future possibilities, and develop strategies for more faith communities toward more effective and comprehensive adult faith formation.

The Symposium addressed three central questions:

What could adult faith formation in faith communities look like in five years (2016-2020)?

How can faith communities provide vibrant faith formation to address the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults—over the next five years?

How can congregations envision the future shape of adult faith formation and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in faith formation with adults?

The Adult Faith Formation Symposium utilize a scenario planning process to create four scenarios for envisioning the future of adult faith formation. The four scenarios are stories that address significant forces affecting adult faith formation and stimulate new ways of thinking about the present and the future. The four adult faith formation scenarios frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for congregations—as well as denominations—and help leaders prepare more effectively. The four scenarios are not predictions, projections, or prophecies, but rather an attempt to provoke a realization that the future need not simply be more of the same. They are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

Part 1. Introducing Scenario Planning

The participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* envisioned the future of adult faith formation using a process called *scenario thinking*. Jay Ogilvy and Peter Schwartz of Global Business Network describe scenarios as “narratives of alternative environments in which today’s decisions may be played out. They are not predictions. Nor are they strategies. Instead they are more like hypotheses of different futures specifically designed to highlight the risks and opportunities involved in specific strategic issues.” The point is not to gather evidence for some “most probable” future. The point is rather to entertain a number of different possibilities in order to make better choices about the future of faith formation in the face of inevitable uncertainties.

Scenarios are created and used in sets of multiple stories that capture a range of possibilities, good and bad, expected and surprising. They are designed to stretch our thinking about emerging changes and the opportunities and threats that the future might hold. They allow us to weigh our choices more carefully when making short-term and long-term strategic decisions. At its most basic, scenarios help people and organizations order and frame their thinking about the long-term while providing them with the tools and confidence to take action soon. At its most powerful, scenarios help people and

organizations find strength of purpose and strategic direction in the face of daunting, chaotic and even frightening circumstances.

Three principles underpin any successful scenario planning approach.

1. **Take the Long-View.** The day-to-day work of most organizations is driven by near-term concerns and one to three year planning horizons. However, in reality, most strategic choices—from new projects to new leadership—are choices that will play out a long way into the future. Taking the long view offers a more proactive and anticipatory approach to address the forces affecting church life; to see both challenges and opportunities more clearly; and to consider the long-term effects and potential unintended consequences of actions that a church might take.
2. **Think from the “Outside-in.”** Most religious organizations, like all organizations, are surprised by discontinuous events because they spend their time thinking about what they are most familiar with: their own organization. They think from the inside—the things they can control—out to the world in which they operate. Conversely, thinking from the outside-in begins with pondering external social, technological, environmental, economic, religious, and political shifts—changes that might, over time, profoundly affect the world in which the organization exists, creating new risks and opportunities in the process.
3. **Embrace Multiple Perspectives.** The introduction of multiple perspectives helps to better understand and challenge assumptions while painting an expansive picture of an issue or idea. The result is the broadening of peripheral vision—new threats and opportunities are seen that otherwise might have been missed.

Although scenario planning is a highly imaginative and interactive exercise, the process is systematic with five distinct phases.

1. **Orient.** The goal of this phase is to clarify the issue at stake, and to use that issue as an orienting device throughout the remaining phases.
2. **Explore.** The second phase explores the many “driving forces” that could shape the focal question. Driving forces are the forces of change outside the organization that will shape future dynamics in predictable and unpredictable ways. They might include new technologies, political shifts, economic conditions or social dynamics. Driving forces can be either *predetermined elements*—forces that are highly likely to develop in a direction that is known and unchangeable; or *uncertainties*—forces that are important, but unpredictable in terms of how they may play out.
3. **Synthesize.** The next phase involves combining the identified driving forces to create a scenario framework. Usually frameworks are constructed from two of the most important, or “critical” uncertainties. Once a framework is in place, the next step is to develop the scenarios into narratives—stories that begin in the present, and end in the future.
4. **Act.** In this phase, scenarios are used to inform and inspire action. The test of a good set of scenarios is not whether in the end it portrays the future accurately, but whether it enables an organization to learn, adapt and take effective action. After creating the scenarios, the next step is to deeply imagine living and working in each one. What if this scenario is the future? What actions would I take today to prepare? Are there actions I could take to catalyze a desirable future, or to mitigate a negative one? The answers are scenario implications. The patterns and insights that emerge from the implications—across all possible scenarios—can form the

building blocks of an organization’s strategic agenda—the set of priorities that will help you make progress on your long-term goals.

5. **Monitor.** The last phase involves creating mechanisms that will help your organization track shifts in the environment and adjust strategy accordingly.

What are the benefits of scenario thinking and planning for envisioning the future?

- Using a methodological structure that focuses on what is not known, scenario planning achieves greater impact by anticipating alternate outcomes and managing resources accordingly.
- Scenario planning is a powerful tool precisely because the future is unpredictable and shaped by many interacting variables. Scenarios enable us to think creatively and rigorously about the different ways these forces may interact, while forcing us to challenge our own assumptions about what we believe or hope the future will be.
- Scenarios embrace and weave together multiple perspectives and provide us an ongoing framework for spotting and making sense of important changes as they emerge.
- Perhaps most importantly, scenarios give us a new, shared language that deepens our conversations about the future and how we can help to shape it.

No one can definitively map the future of adult faith formation in congregations. However, developing alternate futures can contribute to good decision-making processes that will determine the direction of faith formation. The four adult faith formation scenarios can help frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for congregations – as well as denominations – and help leaders prepare more effectively. The scenarios are meant to stimulate discussion about what choices leaders can make today in order to thrive in the future. The scenarios are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

Part 2. The Focusing Question

Every scenario project has a focal question—a broad yet strategic query that serves as an anchor for the scenarios. For the adult faith formation scenario planning process, the focal questions are:

What could adult faith formation in faith communities look like in five years (2016-2020)?

How can faith communities provide vibrant faith formation to address the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults—over the next five years?

How can congregations envision the future shape of adult faith formation and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in faith formation with adults?

The goal of the adult faith formation scenario project is to inspire creative action in the present through anticipation of possible futures. The four scenarios are stories that address significant forces affecting faith formation and stimulate new ways of thinking about the present and the future. No one knows what lies just beyond the horizon but these four scenarios of the future can inform church leaders of potential challenges and opportunities they may want to prepare for now rather than react to later. The four scenarios are not predictions, projections, or prophecies, but rather an attempt to provoke a realization that the future need not simply be more of the same.

Part 3. Driving Forces

What are the driving forces that will most directly impact the future of adult faith formation in faith communities over the next five years (2016-2020), and more specifically, the ability of faith communities to provide vibrant adult faith formation over the next five years?

We know that faith communities are confronted by a number of significant social, cultural, technological, and generational forces that make faith formation for adults of all ages and generations quite challenging. There are driving forces that we can be reasonably certain will shape the worlds we are describing—these are *predetermined elements* such as the increase in adults over 60 years old and the fact that 10,000 Americans turn 65 years old each day—and that will continue for the next decade.

Predetermined elements are important to any scenario story, but they are not the foundation on which these stories are built. Rather, scenarios are formed around *critical uncertainties*—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our focusing question and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution. Whereas predetermined elements are predictable driving forces, uncertainties are by their nature unpredictable: their outcome can be guessed at but not known. While any single uncertainty could challenge our thinking, the future will be shaped by multiple forces playing out over time. The scenario framework provides a structured way to consider how these critical uncertainties might unfold and evolve in combination.

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* identified driving forces that were “global”—affecting all adults in society, and driving forces that were specific to the four seasons of adults—young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s, and older adults (75+). The analysis at the Symposium reflects research studies and trends that are having a significant impact on the future direction of adult faith formation through 2020.

- Consult Appendix 1. Driving Forces Affecting Adult Faith Formation for the summary of the driving forces identified at Symposium.

Part 4. Critical Uncertainties

A number of *critical uncertainties*—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our focusing question and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution—were identified by the Symposium participants.

- Consult Appendix 3. Critical Uncertainties Facing the Future of Adult Faith Formation for a summary of the critical uncertainties identified at the Symposium.

Six potential uncertainties were selected by the Symposium participants. Each uncertainty is expressed as a continuum of responses. The first set of three focused on the changing world in which adults live today; the second set on the hungers and interests of adults for the spiritual and religious.

The Response of Faith Communities to the Changing World of Adults

1. The response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society (ethnic, households/families, gender, and more)
faith communities resisting diversity -----faith communities embracing diversity

2. The response of faith communities to the busy, stressed, time-crunched, overwhelmed lives of adults today
faith communities responding with a “business as usual” approach to changing adult lives ----- *faith communities responding with with innovative approaches to changing adult lives*

3. The response of faith communities to a “Design Your Own Life” culture
faith communities responding with “one-size-fits-all” adult faith formation ----- *faith communities responding with “one-size-fits one” personalized and customized adult faith formation*

The Hungers and Interests of Adults for the Spiritual and Religious

1. The desire and interest among adults today in developing their spiritual life
decreasing desire and interest ----- *increasing desire and interest*

2. The openness of adults today to belonging and participating in a faith community
decreasing openness ----- *increasing openness*

3. The hunger and interest of adults today in being engaged in adult faith formation experiences in a faith community
decreasing interest ----- *increasing interest*

After careful consideration two uncertainties were selected from the set of six—one from each category to form a matrix with two axes that represent the two critical uncertainties that will affect the future of adult faith formation from 2016-2020. The two chosen uncertainties, introduced below, together define a set of four scenarios for the future of adult faith formation in churches that are divergent, challenging, internally consistent, and plausible. Each of the two uncertainties is expressed as an axis that represents a continuum of possibilities ranging between two endpoints.

Uncertainty #1

The response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society
 (economic, ethnic/cultural, households/families, sexual/gender, spiritual, religious)
faith communities resisting diversity ----- *faith communities embracing diversity*

Uncertainty #2

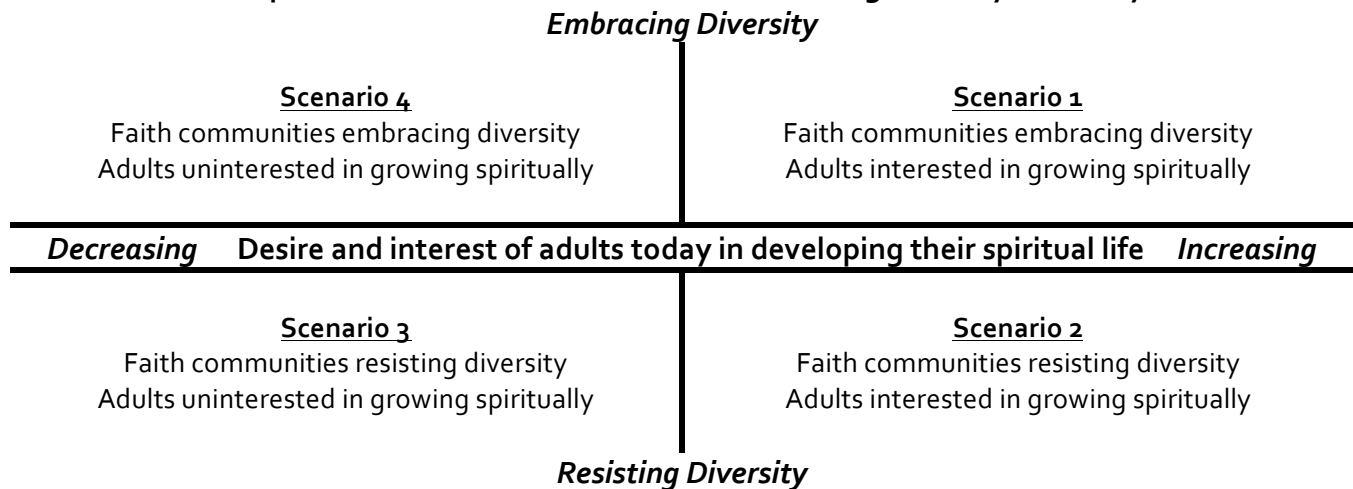
The desire and interest of adults today in developing their spiritual life
decreasing desire and interest ----- *increasing desire and interest*

Part 5. Four Scenarios for the Future of Adult Faith Formation

When the two critical uncertainties are connected in a 2x2 matrix, a set of four stories—or scenarios—are created to describe how the future of adult faith formation could evolve. The scenarios express a range of possible futures and explain why the “main story” of adult faith formation will be framed by the response to these two significant uncertainties. The scenarios are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive—rather they are designed to be both plausible and challenging, to engage the imagination while also raising new questions about what the future of adult faith formation might look and feel like.

The Future of Adult Formation Scenario Matrix

Response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society



No one can definitively map the future. We do not know which of the scenarios will rise in ascendancy over the next five years. *Will adults desire and interest in growing spiritually increase or decrease over the next five years? Will faith communities move toward embracing or resisting the increasing diversity in society and the adult population?*

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* described the “world” of each scenario by describing what’s happening in the lives of young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults with special attention to their *desire and interest in growing spiritually* and what’s happening in the lives of the faith communities with special attention to how *faith communities are embracing or resisting the increasing diversity in society and the adult population*.

Scenario 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually.

Characteristics of Scenario 1

- ✓ This is a vibrant and inclusive faith community where everyone is welcomed and encouraged to belong, and where people experience hospitality, acceptance, and love.
- ✓ This is a faith community which honors and celebrates cultural diversity, and where cultural expression is abundant in all aspects of church life.
- ✓ This is a faith community that provides opportunities for learning, faith growth, and worship in languages of the people of the community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that address the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community that offers a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to engage adults—in every season of adulthood—in growing spiritually, learning about the Bible and their religious tradition, serving the needs of others and working for justice,

developing spiritual practices and disciplines, and much more. And all of this is customized around the interests, needs, and busy schedules and commitments of today's adults.

- ✓ This is a faith community that utilizes online environments and digital tools to connect with and engage adults in spiritual and religious growth.
- ✓ This is a faith community that guides adults in identifying their gifts and strengths and utilizing them in ministry within the faith community and in mission to the world.
- ✓ This is a faith community that promotes adult discipleship and deepens adult's relationship with Jesus through a variety of experiences and encounters, and that guides adults in living their faith in daily life.
- ✓ This is a faith community that incorporates adults fully into the intergenerational life of the community—developing relationships across generations, providing opportunities for mentoring younger generations, engaging them in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is engaging adults in transforming the world—serving the needs of the poor and vulnerable, working for social justice, addressing racism and prejudice, and caring for creation.
- ✓ This is a faith community that helps adults manage and grow through the kinds of transitions, milestones, developmental tasks, and changes in personal meaning that mark the journey of adulthood; and that brings a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing.
- ✓ This is a faith community that engages in missional outreach to adults who are spiritually open but not engaged in the faith community by expanding and extending the church's presence through connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live; and providing pathways for adults to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive community.

Scenario 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Characteristics of Scenario 2

- ✓ This is a faith community that is not developing responsive approaches, strategies, and programming that address the diverse adult population and engage adults in growing spiritually.
- ✓ This is a faith community that may not have the staffing and/or resources to respond effectively to the diverse life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults.
- ✓ This is faith community that is finding it difficult to understand and accept the social, cultural, economic, and religious changes that have produced a more diverse population of adults.
- ✓ This is faith community whose adult members are (or have been) primarily from one cultural or economic group, but now finds itself struggling to adapt to changes in the lives of adults and in the adult population in their surrounding neighborhood/community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that sees their mission in faith formation to serve only the adult members who are active in their faith community.

- ✓ This is a faith community that is struggling to create an inclusive community where all adults are welcomed and encouraged to belong, and where people experience hospitality, acceptance, and love.
- ✓ This is a faith community with declining numbers of adults engaged in the life of the community, especially young adults, and an increasing number of adults who are participating occasionally in the life of the faith community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is not engaged in missional outreach and relationship building with adults in their everyday lives.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is most often resistant to any type of change or transformation, preferring to rely on the “tried and true” ways, even if they are not working any longer.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults are finding opportunities for spiritual growth, service to others, Scripture enrichment, and more in venues outside the faith community—such as in online communities and resource centers, house churches, movements, social justice organizations and more.

Scenario 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches. In light of this many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Characteristics of Scenario 3

- ✓ This is a world in which adults lead busy lives filled with work, family, sports/leisure, and other activities, and find little need for faith or spirituality or involvement in a faith community.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have a sense that they are self-sufficient and that there is no room in their life for faith or spirituality.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have had negative experiences of church life—many feel rejected because of their lifestyle, others experience a lack of welcoming and hospitality, while still others feel churches are too legalistic or judgmental.
- ✓ This is faith community that does not understand and accept the social, cultural, economic, and religious changes that have produced a more diverse population of adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community that may not have the staffing and/or resources to respond effectively to the diverse life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community with declining numbers of adults engaged in the life of the community, especially young adults, and an increasing number of adults who are participating occasionally in the life of the faith community.
- ✓ This is faith community whose adult members are (or have been) primarily from one cultural or economic group, but now finds itself struggling to adapt to changes in the lives of adults and in the adult population in their surrounding neighborhood/community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is not engaged in missional outreach and relationship building with adults in the wider community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is most often resistant to any type of change or transformation, preferring to rely on the “tried and true” ways, even if they are not working any longer.

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

Characteristics of Scenario 4

- ✓ This is a world in which adults lead busy lives filled with work, family, sports/leisure, and other activities, and find little need for faith or spirituality or involvement in a faith community.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have a sense that they are self-sufficient and that there is no room in their life for faith or spirituality.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have had negative experiences of church life—many feel rejected because of their lifestyle, others experience a lack of welcoming and hospitality, while still others feel churches are too legalistic or judgmental.
- ✓ This is a vibrant and inclusive faith community where everyone is welcomed and encouraged to belong, and where people experience hospitality, acceptance, and love.
- ✓ This is a faith community that engages in missional outreach to adults who are uninterested and unaffiliated by making connections in person and online, building relationships, and engaging with adults in hospitable environments for conversation.
- ✓ This is a faith community providing pathways for adults to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is equipping adults who are growing in their faith and active in the community to connect with adults who are uninterested and uninvolved.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is offering an array of life-centered programs and activities for each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, older adults—in a variety of venues.
- ✓ This is a faith community which honors and celebrates cultural diversity, and where cultural expression is abundant in all aspects of church life.
- ✓ This is a faith community that provides opportunities for learning, faith growth, and worship in the languages of the people of the community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is engaging adults in the wider community in transforming the world—serving the needs of the poor and vulnerable, working for social justice, addressing racism and prejudice, and caring for creation.
- ✓ This is a faith community that helps adults manage and grow through the kinds of transitions, milestones, developmental tasks, and changes in personal meaning that mark the journey of adulthood; and that brings a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing.
- ✓ This is a faith community which partners with other churches, synagogues, and mosques to learn how to live in a more diverse world and to serve the needs of all adults in the community.

The Future of Adult Formation Scenarios

Response of Faith Communities to the Increasing Diversity in Society

Embracing Diversity

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

Scenario 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually

Desire & Interest of Adults in Developing their Spiritual Life

Decreasing

Increasing

Scenario 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches. In light of this many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Scenario 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Resisting Diversity

Part 6. Strategies for Creatively Responding to the Four Adult Faith Formation Scenarios

How can the four scenarios inform and inspire action in faith communities? What could it look like to live and work in each scenario? What actions can a faith community take today to create a desirable future or to mitigate a negative one? The answers to these questions are scenario strategies. The patterns and insights that emerge from the implications can form the building blocks of a strategic agenda for the future of adult faith formation. The following strategies are offered as a starting point for envisioning how a faith community can respond to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario. These ideas can serve as a basis for planning new initiatives to respond proactively and innovatively to the four scenarios. For more programming ideas, consult the following resources:

The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. Edited by John Roberto. Authors: Ed Gordon, Dorothy Linthicum, Jim Merhaut, Kyle Oliver, Mary Ann Ronan, Janet Schaeffler, and Tom Zanzig. Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith, 2015.

1. Faith Formation for All the Seasons of Adulthood—John Roberto
2. The Development of Modern Adult Education and Faith Formation—Ed Gordon
3. Young Adulthood—Kyle Oliver
4. Midlife Adulthood—Jim Merhaut
5. Mature Adulthood—Janet Schaeffler
6. Older Adulthood—Dorothy Linthicum
7. Spiritual Transformation for Adult Faith Formation—Tom Zanzig
8. Developing Adult Faith Formation Programming—John Roberto
9. Designing Twenty-First Century Adult Faith Formation—John Roberto
(Order from www.LifelongFaith.com)

Lifelong Faith Journal, Fall 2015 Special Issue: Practices & Approaches for the Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith, 2015.

- Faith Formation with Young Adults - Kyle Oliver
- Faith Formation with Midlife Adults - Jim Merhaut
- Faith Formation with Mature Adults - Janet Schaeffler
- Faith Formation with Older Adults - Dorothy Linthicum
(Online at www.LifelongFaith.com)

Adult Faith Formation Resources Online:

- Lifelong Faith: www.LifelongFaith.com
- Seasons of Adult Faith: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com
- Faith Formation Matters & GEMS Newsletter: www.janetschaeffler.com
- Faith Formation Learning Exchange (see Adults in “Research” and “Practices & Approaches”): www.FaithFormationLearningExchange.net

1. Designing Adult Faith Formation using the Scenarios

Here is a simple process developing targeted programming for the four scenarios. There is a detailed adult faith formation planning guide in Chapter 9 in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* that can provide assistance in moving from ideas to programs to implementation.

1. Identify which scenario or scenarios best describes your congregation. For example, your congregation may *embrace the diversity of adults* (Scenarios 1 and 4) and have adults who have a desire and interest in growing spiritually and adults who have little interest and desire. Your congregation may be unwilling to embrace the diversity of adults and you find that most adults do not have an interest or desire for spiritual growth (Scenario 3).
2. Develop a profile of your current adult faith formation programming for the scenarios you have selected. List the current activities in the appropriate scenario; some activities may be listed multiple times. Answer the question: *Ways we are currently addressing this scenario in our faith community.*
3. After completing the profile, analyze how your faith community is addressing the needs of the adults and the situation of the faith community in the scenarios you have identified. Use questions such as:
 - How effectively are we responding to the challenges and opportunities of the scenario(s)?
 - Viewed through lens of the scenario(s), what are our strengths?
 - Viewed through the lens of the scenario(s), what are the areas in need of improvement or growth?
 - What have we learned about our ministries and/or programming when viewed through the lens of the scenario(s)?
4. Based on your analysis, identify *the most important* areas for growth, development, improvement, and/or enhancement. The areas for development can be actions that you can take **to catalyze a desirable future**, or to **mitigate a negative one** in a particular scenario. Then decide on which areas are of the highest priority to pursue in the short term (a year) or long term (2-3 years).
5. Generate a variety of ideas for addressing each growth area. Use this Guide as a resource for ideas and strategies. Ideas suggested under one scenario can be applied to other scenarios with adaptation.
6. Select the best ideas to develop into new initiatives. Consider piloting the new initiatives with a small group of your target audience, making revisions, and then offering the new project to a wider audience. Through this piloting process, you can test the initiative and the implementation plan, get feedback from your target audience, improve the initiative, and then develop plans to reach a wider audience.

2. Three Essential Practices for 21st Century Adult Faith Formation

The following three practices are essential starting points for developing a comprehensive approach to 21st century adult faith formation that can address the situations presented in the four adult faith formation scenarios..

Practice 1. Variety of Faith Formation Programming

Adult faith formation provides a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments—independent, mentoring, at home, small groups, large groups, congregation-wide, and community/world—in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.

Practice 2. A Network of Faith Formation

Adult faith formation is developed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces—that can offer adults “playlists” with a wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences tailored to their needs and interests—all offered on a digital platform that makes it easy for adults to find and follow pathways for growth in faith.

Practice 3. Online and Digitally Enabled Faith Formation

Adult faith formation is digitally enabled—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and digitally connected—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media.

Adult faith formation can now utilize digital technologies and digital media to engage people with faith-forming content anytime, anyplace, just-in-time—and extend and expand faith formation from physical, face-to-face settings into people’s daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms for adult faith formation (websites) integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365.

- Consult Appendix 4. Three Practices for 21st Century Adult Faith Formation for descriptions of these three practices.
- Consult Chapters 1 and 8 in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* For more information on strategies and designing adult faith formation.

3. Strategies for the Adult Formation Scenarios

The scenarios are meant to stimulate discussion about what choices faith communities can make today in order to thrive over the next five years. The scenarios are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

Imagine what adult faith formation could look and feel like in your faith community if you are responding to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario.

Imagine the life of your faith community in 2020 if adult faith formation addresses these four scenarios.

Imagine what could happen in the lives of adults in your faith community and wider community if you are develop strategies, approaches, and programming that engages a diversity of adults in personal, spiritual, and religious growth.

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* generated dozens of ideas for addressing the particular needs and situation of each scenario. You can download this list of ideas from www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com. Go to the “Future” menu all of the Symposium documents.

This section provides a limited number of “core” strategies, developed from the Symposium ideas, for designing new initiatives in adult faith formation tailored to the specifics of each of the four scenarios. Each strategy needs to be designed around the particular life tasks and spiritual/religious needs of the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

- Consult Appendix 2. Key Characteristics of the Seasons of Adulthood to assist you in designed strategies around the lives of each season of adulthood.

You will find that several strategies are found in more than one scenario. This happens because a strategy can be adapted to fit the needs and situation of multiple scenarios. This often involves refocusing where or how a strategy is implemented. This means that developing one strategy—in different versions—can address the needs of adults in two or more scenarios.

- Consult Appendix 5. Strategies for Adult Faith Formation for more ideas to use in designing programming.
- For models, approaches, and programming ideas for each season of adulthood go to: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.
- For adult programming for the four seasons of adulthood download the Fall 2015 Lifelong Faith Journal: *Practices & Approaches for the Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*: www.LifelongFaith.com.
- For examples of missional programming: www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/missional.html.
- For intergenerational programming, case studies, and resources go to: www.intergenerationalfaith.com.

Scenario 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Interested Adults & Diversity-Embracing Communities

Emphasis: Offering a great variety of faith formation experiences for each season of adulthood in physical and online spaces for adults who want to grow in faith within a supportive faith community that embraces the diversity of the adult population.

1. Offering a diversity of faith forming activities tailored to each season of adulthood: learning the tradition, Bible study, spiritual practices and disciplines, celebrating rituals and the church seasons, retreat experiences, and more.
2. Engaging adults in service to the poor and vulnerable, justice and advocacy, and care for creation—locally and globally—in a variety of timeframes (occasional, full day, weeklong).
3. Developing processes for identifying the gifts and strengths of adults, and equipping adults for ministry within the faith community and in mission to the world.

4. Equipping adults for ministry in the faith community and mission in the world.
5. Offering worship experiences responsive to the seasons of adulthood and to the religious and spiritual lives of adults; responsive to the cultures and languages in the faith community; and offered in different times and spaces.
6. Preparing adults who are active in the faith community for outreach to uninterested and unaffiliated, and developing their skills for faith sharing and mentoring.
7. Engaging adults in whole-church experiences for all generations that build relationships and nurture faith: worship, church year seasons, community gatherings, service to the community.
8. Creating intergenerational experiences that develop relationships across generations, provide opportunities for mentoring younger generations, engaging adults in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.
9. Developing mentoring opportunities across the faith community: younger to older, older to younger, mentors for newly married couples and new parents, career mentors for young adults, spiritual guides for prayer and spiritual direction, and more.
10. Supporting adults in the many transitions and milestones of adulthood and bringing a faith perspective to the transitions and milestones; ritualizing these milestones within the faith community, at home, and with peers.
11. Equipping the grandparent generation with knowledge, skills, and resources for faith forming activities within their families, especially with their grandchildren.
12. Developing marriage preparation that addresses marriage life-skills (communication, problem-solving), household life skills (budgeting, roles), and spiritual and faith enrichment.
13. Offering marriage enrichment throughout life that addresses knowledge and skills appropriate to that stage of life and spiritual and faith enrichment.
14. Partnering with other churches, synagogues, and mosques to help adults learn how to live in a more diverse world and understand the diverse religious traditions in their community.

Scenario 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Interested Adults & Diversity-Resisting Communities

Emphasis: Connecting adults in each season of adulthood who want to grow spiritually with a variety of faith formation experiences in physical locations in the wider community and online communities and resource centers in a faith community that is not supportive of responding to the diversity in the adult population.

1. Connecting adults to opportunities for spiritual growth, service to others, Scripture enrichment, and more in venues outside the faith community—such as in online communities and resource centers, house churches, movements, social justice organizations—and partnering with other churches to provide a variety of programming for spiritually interested adults.
2. Hosting and conducting adult programming in community settings (cafes, pubs).
3. Partnering with local and national organizations to provide opportunities for adults to engage in service to the poor and vulnerable, justice and advocacy, and care for creation.
4. Developing processes for identifying the gifts and strengths of adults who are active in the faith community and utilizing them in ministry within the church and in mission to the world.

5. Developing mentoring opportunities across the faith community: younger to older, older to younger, mentors for newly married couples and new parents, career mentors for young adults, spiritual guides for prayer and spiritual direction, and more.
6. Supporting adults in the many transitions and milestones of adulthood and bringing a faith perspective to the transitions and milestones through online communities and resources, and ritualizing milestones and transitions at home and with peers.
7. Equipping the grandparent generation, who are engaged in the faith community, with knowledge, skills, and resources for faith forming activities within their families, especially with their grandchildren, through online resources and programs/activities in other churches.
8. Developing marriage preparation that addresses marriage life-skills (communication, problem-solving), household life skills (budgeting, roles), and spiritual and faith enrichment using online resources, mentors from the faith community, and resources and programs from other churches and religious organizations.
9. Offering marriage enrichment throughout life that addresses knowledge and skills appropriate to that stage of life and spiritual and faith enrichment using online resources, mentoring, and resources and programs from other churches and religious organizations.
10. Utilizing intergenerational church events – where all the generations are already gathered – to develop relationships across generations and engage adults in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.

Scenario 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches. In light of this many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Uninterested Adults & Diversity-Resisting Communities

Emphasis: Connecting with adults who are not interested in the spiritual life in a faith community that is not supportive of efforts to respond to the diversity in the adult population.

1. Equipping the grandparent generation, who are active in the faith community, with knowledge, skills, and resources for faith forming activities within their families, especially with their grandchildren.
2. Equipping adults who are active in the faith community to engage in outreach, relationship building, and witness with adults at work and in the community.
3. Using existing children and teen programming as opportunities to connect with parents (such as vacation Bible school and youth mission trips) and explore possibilities for offering programming around their needs as parents and their adult spiritual journeys (online or in other safe, conducive settings).
4. Utilizing social media, especially Facebook, to connect with adults; providing a variety of links to online communities and resources relevant to adult life issues and spiritual needs.
5. Developing a digital platform to provide online resources, programming, and experiences for adults for adults to use individually and at home.
6. Partnering with churches and organizations to offer community-wide adult programming, such as life skills, arts, music, counseling, marriage enrichment, family enrichment, and more.
7. Partnering with other churches to host and conduct adult programming in community settings (cafes, pubs).

8. Partnering with local and national organizations to provide opportunities for adults to engage in service to the poor and vulnerable, justice and advocacy, and care for creation
9. Supporting adults in the many transitions and milestones of adulthood, creating educational programs and small groups around life transitions, and bringing a faith perspective to the transitions and milestones.
10. Utilizing intergenerational church events – where all the generations are already gathered – to develop relationships across generations and engage adults in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.
11. Organizing small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to spirituality-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.

(See Scenario 4 for additional ideas to reach spirituality uninterested adults.)

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Uninterested Adults & Diversity-Embracing Communities

Emphasis: Engaging a supportive community in missional outreach with pathways for spiritual growth and community engagement, and in providing life-centered faith formation experiences in physical and online spaces that connect with adults who are not interested in the spiritual life.

1. Engaging in missional outreach to adults who are uninterested and unaffiliated by making connections in person and online, building relationships, and engaging with adults in hospitable environments for conversation.
2. Developing pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community—helping move people from discovery to exploration to commitment—such as “Introduction to the Christian faith” program that is an opportunity for people to investigate the claims of the Christian faith in an informal, no pressure, nonjudgmental, and friendly environment that emphasizes exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal setting.
3. Offering an apprenticeship in discipleship process for adults who want to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian way of life—helping them understand who God is, what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to live in the Christian community—with one-on-one mentoring, small group sharing, personal study, prayer, and retreat experiences.
4. Developing community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
5. Creating a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page (and other social media) to connect with people.
6. Connecting with people’s life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
7. Connecting with people during transitions and milestones (marriage, birth of a baby, job transitions, divorce, retirements, funerals, and more), bringing a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing, and providing opportunities for ritualizing the milestones.

8. Developing high quality, relationship-building events designed to draw people from the wider community into relationships with people from your church such as social events, concerts, service projects, cultural festivals, arts festivals, and more.
9. Organizing small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to faith-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
10. Sponsoring community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips that are open to everyone so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.
11. Creating digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars, video-streaming presentations, and more
12. Honoring and celebrating cultural diversity in all aspects of church life; and providing opportunities for learning, faith growth, and worship in the languages of the people of the community.
13. Partnering with other churches, synagogues, and mosques to help adults learn how to live in a more diverse world and understand the diverse religious traditions in their community.

Appendix 1

Driving Forces Affecting Adult Faith Formation

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* identified driving forces that were “global”—affecting all adults in society, and driving forces that were specific to the four seasons of adults—young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s, and older adults (75+). The analysis at the Symposium reflects research studies and trends that are having a significant impact on the future direction of adult faith formation through 2020.

Driving Forces in the World Affecting Adults & the Future of Adult Faith Formation

Economic

- Increasing income gap or divide between the rich and everybody else, especially the poor
- Increasing economic uncertainty—undermining personal sense of security and the future
- Increasing economic challenge for young adults
- Financial stress—multiple jobs, family stress, double-income homes, working on Sunday

Ethnic-Cultural

- Ethnic diversity is rapidly increasing
- Rise of immigration: refugees and immigrants from a variety of places around the world present challenges and opportunities
- Forming community in a multicultural society
- Lack of multicultural inclusiveness in religious communities (worship, community, service)
- Societal understanding of gender is changing
- Increasing awareness of the institutional racism

Generational/Family

- Increase in multigenerational families; grandparents raising grandchildren
- Changing family structures—more diverse family forms; the definition of “family” is fluid and changing; many families are judged or excluded because they have a different family format
- Changing views of marriage and sexuality
- Increase in marriages between adults of different religions and different ethnic cultures

Religious

- Church is no longer at the center of life: Sundays are no longer sacred, and activities and gatherings are no longer centered around church; people don’t have time for church in their busy lives; there is competition with other groups or institutions for adults’ time and participation; people are overwhelmed: jobs, family, commitments, etc.
- Christianity and churches are seen as a consumer product; people shop for a faith or a church
- Rise of unaffiliated and uninvolved adults: more unchurched parents coming to church with unchurched children; young adults finding communities outside of church
- Divisiveness in the church: theological, leadership styles, leaders and people

Societal

- Busyness of everyday life and the “overwhelmed” and “overscheduled experience of modern life
- Work demands more attention and more adults’ time; traditional 40 hour work week no longer exists

- Awareness of the impact of environmental/climate change and its impact on people
- A general distrust or disinterest in institutions
- Increasing mobility which leads to the loss of local roots, traditions, and rituals; there's not enough time to build community
- Gender issues, especially the needs and rights of LGBTQ adults

Technology

- Technology is pervasive throughout society and in use 24/7
- Challenge of keeping up with rapidly changing technology
- Technology can lead to isolation between generations and socioeconomic groups; technology can unite or divide; there is a lack of technology in lower income groups
- Challenge of helping older adults use technology
- Technology provides increase access to educational and formational resources
- Technology is redefining the way we related to each other and the way we gather

Driving Forces in the Lives of Adults Affecting the Future of Adult Faith Formation

Young Adults

- Using new technologies and social media in everyday life; new ways of connecting and communicating; new ways of accessing information and learning
- Deep institutional ambivalence: there is a suspicion of authority, detachment from institutions; some young adults are finding faith outside institutional churches
- Searching for authenticity in relationships, work, organizations, and faith
- Still developing their identity; they are seekers and makers of meaning
- Living in a culture of “unlimited” choices
- Tend to be more “spiritual” than “religious”
- Seeking to make a difference in the world; service, social justice, care for creation
- Delaying marriage and having children
- Living in an unpredictable world where danger is a part of life
- Being the most diverse generation, especially ethnically
- Entering the workforce in a time of economic uncertainty with a changing economy and diminishing job prospects
- Carrying large debts from college loans because of the increasing cost of college

Midlife Adults

- Living at a time in adulthood with high competence and functioning
- Searching for identity and relationships verses a functional view of life as they move toward mature adulthood; they are on a quest to be the best version of themselves
- Needing and hungering for deeper relationships
- Reflecting on who they are in relationship to God, others, self as opposed to what they do
- Experiencing busyness in life which inhibits participation in church
- Renegotiating commitments; assessing career and the future
- Facing concerns about finances and work
- Seeking a learning environment that allows questions
- Seeking the relevance of religion to their everyday lives and to their stage of life; and how to connect faith and life
- Needing and hungering for sensual, symbolic, inclusive, non-dualistic religion (especially worship)
- Increasingly becoming a “sandwich” generation—raising children and caring for parents; needing balance in their commitments
- Seeking authenticity in life, work, leadership, institutions, church

Mature Adults

- Working longer; changing careers; developing encore or 2nd careers
- Seeking to continue to make a difference in the world through working for social justice, serving, and making a difference in the local community
- Desiring to share their lives, wisdom, and experience with younger generations; mentoring
- Losing trust in institutions and their leaders, including religious institutions and leaders
- Looking for depth; seeking wisdom not just knowledge
- Seeking new learning experiences and new ways of learning
- Needing to leave a legacy (generativity)
- Experiencing a variety of life transitions and milestones—aging, relationships, retirement, grand parenting, social security, health care/Medicare
- Dealing with aging issues: financial security, health, housing arrangements
- Seeking to integrate faith with the life issues and transitions of mature adulthood
- Increasingly living a “mosaic” life—working, retiring, grand parenting, vacationing, volunteering

Older Adults

- Living increasingly in naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs)
- Having grandparents working as caregivers
- Living at a distance from other family members
- Changing the society and the church because people are living longer (longevity) and changing the rules of dying change
- Dividing the generations into separate groups for spiritual and social opportunities
- Respecting adults over 75 years old; honoring the elderly through church activities and ways for them to share their insights and wisdom with others
- Reaching older adults who are homebound and unable to participate in church and community events
- Increasing connectivity and mobility by technology and other means and its impact on older adults
- Experiencing financial difficulties; working until a later age
- Experiencing transitions: emotional, relational, physical, loss of control
- Recognizing the importance of memories
- Engaging in elder storytelling—witnessing to their spiritual journey, connecting to a purpose
- Experiencing physical limitations; having transportation and accessibility issues, feeling isolated
- Facing decisions about death and dying

Appendix 2

Key Characteristics of the Seasons of Adulthood

(From Chapter Eight in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*)

Key Characteristics of Young Adults

- Young adults are exploring their identity: trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work, developing an individual sense of autonomy, and stabilizing a self-concept and body image.
- Young adults are “tinkering”—putting together a life from the skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand.
- Young adults are developing and maintaining intimate relationships with trust, love, and caring.
- Young adults are transitioning from their family of origin toward establishing independence in living arrangement, finances, career, and other aspects of their lives.
- Young adults are differentiating self without repudiating or replacing their family of origin—sorting out emotionally what they take from their family of origin, what they leave behind, and what they will create for themselves.
- Young adults are developing a career and occupational identity and working to establish a work-life balance.
- Young adults are adjusting to the expectations and responsibilities of the “adult” world.
- Young adults—many but not all—are committing to a marital partner, defining and learning the roles of married life.
- Young adults—many but not all—are having children and becoming parents, establishing a new family with its own rules, roles, responsibilities, values, and traditions, and developing parenting roles and skills.
- Young adults are engaged in a theological reevaluation and reinvention—regardless of their affiliation or involvement with actual religious institutions—synthesizing tacit beliefs (synthetic-conventional faith) and revising implicit beliefs in light of stepping out of their social system of origin (individuated-reflective faith).

Key Characteristics of Midlife Adults

- Midlife adults are continuing to seek a definition for self that is now focused on “Who am I with you?” Relationships take on deeper meaning and compel them to explore how the self is adjusted in the context of committed family, work, and civic relationships that have become so important at this stage of life. They are parents, colleagues, leaders, team members, and more.
- Midlife adults are anchoring themselves in a particular way of life filled with stable commitments and relationships.
- Midlife adults are focused on maintaining intimate relationships with other midlife adults while developing the capacity for new kinds of relationships with those younger and older than themselves. The midlife adult is involved in the generative task of caring and guiding the next generations (including children and grandchildren) and with caring for the older generation.
- Midlife adults are building extensive personal networks for themselves and their families—traditional networks around their families, coworkers, churches, and other organizations, supplemented by digital social networks that allow more frequent conversations. Midlife adults are striving for a healthy balance in their personal and social networks.
- Midlife adults are evaluating their lives at its midpoint and often growing beyond the pressures of the present moment toward an appreciation of the deeper meanings symbolized in religious tradition. Time for refreshment and reflection supports the active expression of generativity.

and care. Midlife adults are reflecting on “What are we spending and being spent for? What commands and receives our best time and energy? What causes, dreams, goals, or institutions are pouring out our life for? To what or whom are we committed in life and in death? What are our most sacred hopes, our most compelling goals, and purposes in life?”

- Midlife adults are engaged in family life and parenting children, adolescents, and, often, young adults. They are allowing for the increasing independence of adolescents while maintaining enough structure to foster continued family development. They are adjusting patterns of family communication, traditions, and celebrations for adolescent and young adult children. Many are adapting to an empty-nest household and redefining the marriage relationship and roles now that children are no longer at home full-time.
- Midlife adults are seeking a religion that emphasizes personal identity, religious experience, and a quest for religious identity in community. They want a religion emphasizing the sensual and experiential, combining the sacred and the profane, and incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs. They insist on an authentic religious experience that acknowledges the ambiguities, trials, and successes of life.

Key Characteristics of Mature Adults

- Mature adults are addressing the challenge of generativity (or its failure, stagnation)—establishing and guiding the next generation, striving to create or nurture things that will outlast them through caring for others, and creating and accomplishing things that make the world a better place.
- Mature adults approaching older adulthood are addressing the challenge of integrity—reflecting on the life they have lived and coming away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair.
- Mature adults are experiencing physical changes and decline, coming to terms with the cognitive changes related to a changed perspective on time and a personal, existential awareness of death. They are seeking to stay physically and mentally fit.
- Mature adults are thinking about, planning for, and disengaging from their primary career occupations, launching second or third careers, and developing new identities and new ways to be productively engaged.
- Mature adults are retiring from full-time work and planning for sufficient income that will last into their later adult years.
- Mature adults are blending (part-time) work, volunteering and civic engagement, pursuit of new interests, travel, and their role as grandparent into a new lifestyle for the mature adult years.
- Mature adults are concerned about having adequate health care into later life and providing for their own or a spouse/partner’s long-term care needs.
- Mature adults are establishing new patterns of relating to spouses, children, siblings, parents, and friends; and leaving some existing relationships and beginning new ones.
- Mature adults are experiencing changes in the marital relationship now that parenting responsibilities are minimal, developing adult-to-adult relationships between grown children and their parents, becoming grandparents, realigning relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren, and caring for the older generation and dealing with disabilities and death.
- Mature adults are moving to the very core of their faith tradition, while appreciating other religious traditions. They are seeking a self-reflective quest for individual wholeness, a search for depth and meaning, as well as guidance for living one’s life. They tend to recognize that spirituality must be cultivated through sustained practice. Spirituality will be a significant aspect of the remainder of their lives.
- Mature adults seek to be in service to others that is mission driven and can make a difference. They want to do things that give their lives purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. They want to know their contributions truly matter.

- Mature adults seek spiritual growth in a time of significant life transitions and in a time when they are searching for meaning and purpose in life as they enter the second half of life and evaluating the things that really provide lasting fulfillment. They desire meaningful relationships where people can connect with one another and talk about spiritual and life issues.
- Mature adults seek intergenerational relationships to share their lives, stories, and faith across generations, and to be united with the whole faith community.

Key Characteristics of Older Adults

- Older adults are remaining vital and actively engaged in the lives of their community, church, social network, and family well into their 80s and 90s. Many are still involved in leadership roles at church and in the community.
- Older adults are experiencing changes in their body and a decline in mental and physical ability, such as a loss of hearing or vision or dexterity. Some older adults experience varying degrees of dementia. For many older adults these mental and physical changes reduce their mobility resulting in isolation from others.
- Older adults are continuing to learn and process new information, and many live well into their 90s with memory and logic intact.
- Older adults are addressing the challenge of integrity—reflecting on the life they have lived and coming away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair. They are cultivating wisdom in which one’s perspective on the world and human relationships reflect an inner sense of liberation from the rules, roles, and rituals of the past.
- Older adults are taking on new roles as senior citizens and adjusting to the role of mentor and sage in their extended family.
- Older adults are experiencing losses of friends and loved ones: death of a spouse, family members, and close friends.
- Older adults are facing the growing and continuous challenge of maintaining their independence, an issue of high priority for them, and the desire to stay in their own homes—“aging in place.” Many will reluctantly come to accept being cared for by their family and moving from their own home into other living arrangements (with their children or in senior living or assisted living situations).
- Older adults have become the oldest generation in an extended family system comprising adult children, married children and their spouses, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.
- Older adults are becoming reconciled to their impending death and accepting their personal mortality. They are dealing with questions coming from the nearness of death: What is life about? How do we want to die?
- Older adults have grown into a deeper more personal faith that is clearly their own and desire ways to continually enrich their faith life.
- Older adults are actively engaged in the life of faith communities. They prefer a more traditional worship experience with familiar hymns and words. They value the Bible and the Christian tradition and desire to continue their learning as Christians.
- Older adults have a hunger for God and a desire to continue growing spiritually.

Appendix 3

Critical Uncertainties Facing the Future of Adult Faith Formation

A number of *critical uncertainties*—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our focusing question and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution—were identified by the Symposium participants

1. Will the desire for spirituality increase or decline in the next five years?
2. Will adults engage with or return to the church or will they be “done” with church.
3. Will technology drive community or isolation?
4. Will the church be stagnant or fluid in response to the demographic and cultural changes?
5. Will trust in church institutions increase or diminish? Will relevance and trust in faith communities and institutions increase or decrease?
6. Will the changing dynamics of family life including the definition of marriage lead to more meaningful ways to mature in faith or will it decrease the capacity of families to be a place of faith formation?
7. Will financial stress cause churches to invest or divest in adult faith formation?
8. Will an increasingly customizable world hinder or promote our ability to form Christian faith?
9. Will increasingly societal diversity lead people to seek faith or turn away?
10. Will global/US socioeconomic system allow for more religious tolerance or intolerance/suppression?
11. Will faith communities focus on discipleship or propping up institutional structures?
12. Will churches become more polarized and isolated or more collaborative within and without?
13. Will society’s perception of a fluid definition of identity move toward the traditional or the nontraditional?
14. Will the world perceive the church as a grace-filled, diversity-accepting, justice-seeking community or as an isolated, angry, divided, self-protective community?
15. Will people become more engaged in community or disconnected from community?
16. Will church structures be more responsive/flexible or more unresponsive/rigid in raising up authentic and relational leaders?
17. Will evolving developments in technology lead people to an increasing or decreasing need for faith formation?

Appendix 4

Three Practices for 21st Century Adult Faith Formation

The following three practices are essential starting points for developing a comprehensive approach to 21st century adult faith formation that can address the situations presented in the four adult faith formation scenarios.

1. Adult faith formation provides a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.
2. Adult faith formation is developed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces—that can offer adults “playlists” with a wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences tailored to their needs and interests—all offered on a digital platform that makes it easy for adults to find and follow pathways for growth in faith.
3. Adult faith formation is digitally enabled—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and digitally connected—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media.

(For more information see Chapter 1. Faith Formation for All the Seasons of Adulthood by John Roberto and Chapter 8. Developing Adult Faith Formation Programming by John Roberto in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*.)

1. Variety of Adult Faith Formation Programming

To address the increasing diversity within the adult population, churches need to offer a greater variety of adult faith formation topics and activities. In the past churches have often chosen the “one size fits all” mentality for adult faith formation: How do we get every adult to participate in a small faith sharing group or to come to the Lenten series or to study the Bible? Adult faith formation is no longer about finding *the* program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with a variety of faith formation activities. It is offering faith formation programming that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing. It is meeting individuals at the point of their spiritual and learning needs and offering personalized pathways of faith growth. By expanding the options for adult learning (offering “something for everyone”), churches can engage more adults in faith formation, even if some of the offerings involve only one person. The new reality of faith formation programming is that churches can offer activities that cater to niches— individuals and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue. They no longer have to worry about reaching a “mass audience.”

Adult faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces. Today, we can diversify faith formation offerings and tailor them to people’s needs and busy lives. This movement from “one sizes fits all” to a variety of faith formation offerings is made possible by the abundance of religious content—print, audio, video, online, and digital—and programming that is now available. And this is made possible by the creation of an online platform (website and social media platforms) that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and programming with a variety of ways to

learn and that is easily accessible and available, anytime and anywhere. Adult faith formation becomes personal, portable, and participatory—the key characteristics of the mobile technology revolution.

Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments, in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. The seven environments provide a way to offer a diversity of programs in different learning environment, as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments—all of which provides adults with more options to participate in adult faith formation and broadens the scope of faith formation offerings. The seven environments include:

1. **Independent (on your own, self-directed)** programming provides maximum flexibility for the learner—when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning for busy adults. Congregations can serve as guide to helping adults find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs, and then deliver that programming online at the church’s faith formation website.
2. **Mentoring** provides a one-to-one relationship for faith formation that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or for those who want to explore Jesus and Christianity after leaving church earlier in life. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring older adults on the use of digital tools and media.
3. **At Home** programming provides individuals and whole families with faith formation programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life, and delivered through a faith formation website. This can include a wide variety of digital media and online programs and resources, such as online learning programs, resources for the church year seasons, Sunday worship resources, online communities and support groups, and links to online faith formation resources and resource centers.
4. **Small Group** programming provides an excellent way to address the diversity of adult needs by organizing a variety of small groups with each one targeted to a particular need or topic. Small groups also provide lots of flexibility in schedule and location. Groups can meet at times and places that best fit their lives, such as group that meets for breakfast weekly at the local restaurant or for coffee at a local coffee shop. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the congregation to sponsor small group programs. Congregational leaders can provide resources, support, and training for leaders, thereby enabling adults to organize their own small groups. Small group programming learning can take many different forms including:
 - Discipleship or faith sharing groups or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological formation study groups, theme or issue oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith sharing groups, book study groups
 - Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups and service/faith in action groups
 - Support groups such as parent groups, caregiving groups, life transition groups
 - Ministry groups involved in leadership in the church and world
5. **Large Group** programming provides a way to serve a large number of adults on topics that appeal to a wide audience. Here is a sampling of large group programming:

- Multi-session programs, such as multi-week courses on theological themes, books of the Bible, parenting at particular stages of family life, adult life issues)
 - One-session program, such as a monthly session on a theological topic
 - Speaker series, such as a multi-evening or multi-week program focused around a particular theological themes, Christian practices, current events, or the season of the church year
 - Roundtable discussions after Sunday worship, such as exploring the Sunday Scripture readings in age groups or intergenerational groups with refreshments
 - Parent parallel learning program at the same time as their children’s program
 - Workshops, such as one day programs targeted to specific life issues—parenting, mid-life issues, aging, and more
 - Film festivals that explore key themes such as relationships, social issues, and meaning in life, and then explore faith themes in the films
 - Field trips, such as visiting an art museum or attending a musical or theatrical performance and then exploring faith themes in art or music or drama
 - Retreat experiences in an evening, one-day, or weekend format at church or at a retreat center
 - Intergenerational programs for all ages in the congregation
6. **Congregational** programming focuses on the events already present in the life of the church: Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, sacramental and ritual celebrations, works of justice and acts of service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. Faith formation can provide experiences for people to *prepare*—with the appropriate knowledge and practices—for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith; and to *guide* their *participation* and *reflection* upon those events. Congregational programming includes leadership and ministry in the congregation and to the world—providing the opportunity for faith formation to prepare people for leadership and ministry, and to reflect upon their engagement.
7. **Community and World** programming provides a way for congregations to utilize existing programs and activities outside the church as part of an adult faith formation plan. This involves researching the resources and programs being offered locally in the community (programs, courses, clinics, workshops, presentations, and more) at community colleges and universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, and more; and nationally/globally through national organizations, religious organizations, online resource centers, and more. This is an important environment for developing initiatives for serving, working for justice, and caring for creation. Many organizations—locally, nationally, and globally—have already created programs that be adopted by the congregation.

2. A Network of Adult Faith Formation

Adult faith formation is developed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces—that can offer adults “playlists” with a wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences tailored to their needs and interests—all offered on a digital platform that makes it easy for adults to find and follow pathways for growth in faith.

An adult faith formation network is a way to offer wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences in online and physical settings. It offers faith formation content and experiences to respond to the diverse religious and spiritual needs of adults today—from the spiritually committed and engaged to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. It enables congregations to become centers for adult learning and faith growth by utilizing the best of the new digital technologies to bring an abundance of meaningful and engaging faith forming experiences—in the congregation and the world, and in a variety of media—to all adults.

The network approach is well suited to addressing the diversity in the lives of adults. It provides a way to offer a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces, and conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world. And this diversity of offerings made possible by the creation of an online platform (website and social media platforms) that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and programming, and provides an online platform for people to learn and connect with each other.

3. Online and Digitally Enabled Adult Faith Formation

Adult faith formation is digitally enabled—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and digitally connected—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media.

Adult faith formation can now utilize digital technologies and digital media to engage people with faith-forming content anytime, anyplace, just-in-time—and extend and expand faith formation from physical, face-to-face settings into people’s daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms for adult faith formation (websites) integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365.

An adult faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering adult faith formation experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources to engage people in learning and faith formation. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive providers of adult faith formation, but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to adults and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online.

Adult faith formation can use blended models of faith formation to connect physical settings and online settings. Adult faith formation today can integrate online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum

Online			Face-to-Face	
Fully Online An online program with all learning done online and limited face-to-face, gathered learning settings	Mostly Online A mostly online program with opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings	Online and Gathered Online learning focused on presenting the content of the program <i>combined with</i> face-to-face, gathered sessions using active learning methods to discuss, practice and apply the content	Gathered and Online Content A gathered event or program that provides online content and activities to extend and expand the learning from the gathered program	Gathered with Online Content A gathered event or program that uses online content as part of the design of the event or program

Imagine the possibilities for utilizing the five blended strategies in designing new programming, re-designing existing programming, surrounding events and programs with online content, and selecting a variety of digital programs, activities, and resources that can be used alone (fully online) or used in conjunction with face-to-face programs.

Gathered with Online Content

Design a gathered program using online content from websites, videos from YouTube or other video sites, and blogs and other social media. With an abundance of high-quality digital content, this first option is the easiest way to bring the digital world into a gathered program.

Gathered and Online Content

Connect the events of church life (Sunday worship, church year seasons) and adult programs at church with online content that extends and deepens the experience of the adults through resources for learning, prayer, ritual, action, etc. For example: extend Sunday worship through the week using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings, sermon, and church year season and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas, conversation activities, and more. Or provide a forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life—delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website.

Online and Gathered

Use the digital platform to provide the content that adults would learn in the gathered setting using print, audio, video, and more. Then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration. Imagine a Bible study program where the videos and print content were online and people gathered for reflection, discussion, and application; or develop an online center for justice and service where adults learn about justice issues, explore biblical and Christian teaching on justice, and then gather to engage in actions to address the justice issue. Imagine a catechumenal process (RCIA) in which the content of the Christian faith is online—in video and audio programs, articles and books, and more—and the gathered sessions focused on interaction, application, theological reflection, etc.

Mostly Online

Offer opportunities for adults to learn online and provide opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings, or in a web conference format. For example: offer online courses or video programs for adult self-study or small group study and gather the adults at the conclusion to share their insights with others who participated. Colleges, seminaries, and religious organizations provide an abundance of online courses, webinars, and video programs on variety of topics relevant to the lives of adults.

Fully Online

Offer online-only faith formation by using existing courses, activities, print and e-books, audio and video programs, and content-rich websites. For example: offer adults a variety of online Bible and theology courses for individual study using online courses from colleges and seminaries, video programs on YouTube, online programs and webinars from religious organizations; or develop an online prayer and spirituality center where people can access daily prayer reflections and devotions, offer prayer intentions, pray for others, learn about spiritual practices, download prayer activities for the home, participate in an online retreat experience, and more.

Appendix 5

Strategies for Adult Faith Formation

(From Chapter Eight in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*)

Caring Relationships

Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and with peers in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.

Cultivating caring relationships among adults (peers) and between adults and other generations (intergenerational) is an essential component of all adult programming. This includes an atmosphere of welcome, hospitality, and relationship-building in all adult programming. Caring relationships are developed in a variety of environments and program—through a variety of small group programs and support groups, through mentoring relationships (older to younger, and younger to older), through intergenerational experiences in the church community, through storytelling and caring conversations among peers and intergenerationally, through spiritual companionship and spiritual direction, through social events (dinners, festivals, activities), and much more.

Support groups are an important element of adult faith formation—connecting faith and life, and integrating life issues and concerns with pastoral care and faith formation. Support groups can address the various circumstances and/or challenges people experience in their lives and offer the encouragement and assistance of others who are facing or who have faced similar situations and difficulties. Support groups can be developed or encouraged around a variety of adult life roles, issues, interests, and transitions, such as parents, caregivers, divorce and remarriage, unemployment, careers, and much more.

Celebrating Milestones and Transitions

Growing in faith and discipleship by celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones that provide a way to experience God's love through significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey.

Milestones are significant moments in life's journey that provide the opportunity for adults to experience God's love, and grow in faith through sacred and ordinary events both in the life of the congregation and in daily life. Milestones faith formation has five elements:

1. *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that take place in daily life—beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage, and creating rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.
2. *Equipping* brings people together for learning, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. Opportunities are provided here to model faith practices for daily life and home life.
3. *Blessing* the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home, says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred. Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment: a prayer during worship for those participating in the milestone moment and a prayer at a small group or with family at home.
4. *Gifting* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.
5. *Reinforcing* the milestone with 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.

Adulthood is filled with milestones and transitions. In times of transition, most people experience feelings of disorientation and tend to question personal priorities; they may seek to “finish unfinished business” or develop new dimensions of their lives. Addressing the needs of people in transition provides important opportunities for adult faith formation by bringing a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing. Adults are motivated when facing life transitions. They seek learning and support to cope with changes in their lives that give rise to new developmental tasks. Consider the following milestone and transitions in adulthood and the potential for developing adult faith formation around these events:

- graduating from college or technical school
- returning from military deployment
- getting married
- birth of a child/adoption of a child
- raising children
- owning a first home
- starting a new job/job changes
- anniversary of marriage
- financial matters
- divorce
- serious illness
- becoming a grandparent
- becoming an empty nest household
- retirement
- caring for an aging parent
- death of a spouse or family member

Learning the Christian Tradition and Reading the Bible

Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world. . . . Growing in faith and discipleship by encountering God in the Bible, and by studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today.

Adult programming focused on learning the Christian tradition and reading the Bible is developed around the principles of effective adult learning and can be offered in online and physical settings and in the seven learning environments. Adult programming facilitates a deeper sense of intimacy with Jesus, fosters a deeper understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith, and explores how the Bible and the Christian tradition provides wisdom for living a meaningful life today.

Adult programming can focus on a wide range of topics and themes relevant to adults at each stage of adulthood:

- *Life Issues*: strengths and gifts development, finances and financial security, physical health and exercise, personal interests, marital relationship, family relationships, wellness, aging
- *Milestones and Life Transitions*: marriage, birth/baptism of a children, jobs and careers, changing living situations, midlife crisis, illness, divorce, empty-nest household, becoming a grandparent, retirement, successful aging, becoming a caregiver
- *Faith Enrichment*: Bible study, Christian teachings, morality and ethics, Christian practices, theological exploration, sharing faith with children and grandchildren
- *Spiritual Enrichment*: spiritual life tasks at each stage of adulthood, prayer practices, spiritual disciplines, retreat experiences, aging as a spiritual process

Praying and Spiritual Formation

Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.

Adult programming can engage adults in learning about and practicing historic Christian spiritual disciplines and in developing a “rule of life” that allows for regular space for the practice of the spiritual disciplines. Adult programming can offer spiritual formation for adults that includes education in the spiritual disciplines and practices, retreat experiences, spiritual guides who serve as mentors on the spiritual journey, and resources on the spiritual disciplines and practices.

Churches can develop the spiritual life of all adults through the intentional teaching of spiritual practices and disciplines in age-appropriate ways by focusing on essential spiritual practices such as Lectio Divina, Scripture reflection, spiritual reading, contemplation, fixed-hour prayer, the examen, solitude and silence, Sabbath, praying with art and music, discernment, fasting, and prayer styles and traditions. Adult programming can utilize a variety of models to teach spiritual practices and disciplines, such as individualized growth plans, online spiritual formation centers and resources, one-on-one spiritual direction or mentoring, small group spiritual formation, retreats, and large group programs (courses, workshops).

Spiritual formation programming can be targeted to specific stages of life, such as programs, activities, and resources that encourage adults to explore a midlife crisis as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Programs and resources can help midlife adults reflect deeply on the path their lives have taken up to this point and about the goals they set earlier in life—career goals, community participation goals, intimacy goals, family goals, personal goals, and faith goals. These goals can be clarified and evaluated at midlife. How have they been met? Are they still unmet? Are they goals worth keeping? Are there new goals that need to be established?

Another example is “spirituality for the second half of life”—providing formation in spiritual disciplines and practices for the second half of life through educational programs, retreat experiences, spiritual guides who serve as mentors on the spiritual journey, and resources on the spiritual disciplines and practices.

Serving, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation

Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God’s creation, and action and advocacy for justice, including community organizing for justice.

Adult programming can offer service and justice projects that are *developmental* in scope with projects geared to different levels of involvement and challenge:

- local mission projects lasting anywhere from a few hours to one day in length
- short-term mission trips lasting anywhere from two to five days and requiring an overnight stay on location
- weeklong mission trips within the United States as well as to foreign countries, designed for those who are ready to take the next big step in service
- global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days that provide the opportunity to be immersed for a longer period in the targeted community and culture
- personalized small group mission trips, organized around the interests and time of the group

Adult service and justice programming incorporate social analysis and theological reflection with action projects to guide people in developing a deeper understanding of the causes of injustice and the

teachings of Scripture and the Christian tradition. The process includes: 1) connect to a social issue (*experience*)—how people are personally affected by an issue or how the issue affects others, 2) explore the social issue (*social analysis*) to understand the causes and underlying factors that promote or sustain the issue; 3) reflect upon the teachings of Scripture and the Christian tradition (*theological reflection*) to develop a faith perspective on the social issue and how people of faith can address the issue; and 4) develop ways to address the issue (*action*) by working for social change and serving those in need as individuals, groups, communities, and/or organizations. The process can begin with a service involvement, leading to social analysis and theological reflection *or* it can begin with people’s experience of a social issue, leading to analysis of the issue, connecting the issue to the faith tradition, and developing action projects of direct service to those in need, and social change and advocacy. (For more information on the process see *Social Analysis—Linking Faith and Justice* by Joseph Holland and Peter Henriot.)

Worshipping and Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

Growing in faith and discipleship by worshipping God with the community of faith—praising God; giving thanks for God’s creative and redemptive work in the world; bringing our human joys and dilemmas to God; experiencing God’s living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission. . . . Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year as they tell the story of faith through the year in an organic and natural sequence of faith learning.

Authentic and meaningful worship enhances faith growth, and purposeful faith formation draws one into deeper and more profound worship. As the faith community journeys through the year, the events of church life provide an organic and natural sequence of faith learning for the whole community. Truly effective faith formation is anchored in the events of church life, the majority of which are marked and celebrated in the context of worship. How the community prays reveals how the community learns, and vice versa. Adult faith formation makes worship and the seasons of the liturgical year central to programming, especially designing learning experiences that connect to Sunday worship and the content of the liturgical year feasts and seasons (see Guide 8 below).

Intergenerational Programming in Adult Faith Formation

Intergenerational programming engages adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in the intergenerational faith experiences. Adults learn by participating in the life of a community. Practices of faith are taught through the interrelationships of worship, learning, service, ritual, prayer, and more. Among the events central to the Christian community are:

- *The feasts and seasons of the church year* provide a natural rhythm and calendar to the curriculum: Advent and Christmas seasons, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lenten season, Holy Week, Easter, Easter season, Pentecost, All Saints and All Souls, and remembrances of saints and holy people throughout the year.
- *Sunday worship and the lectionary* provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its cycle of weekly Scripture readings.
- *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life.
- *Acts of service and justice*—locally and globally—provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teachings on service, justice, and care for the earth.
- *Prayer and spiritual traditions* provide times for reflection, praying as a community, and living the practices of the spiritual life through the community’s life together.
- *Congregational events* that originate within the life and history of an individual congregation can create community.

First, adult faith formation can focus programming around the intergenerational events of church life and *prepare* adults and all generations—with the appropriate knowledge and practices—for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith and *guide* their *participation* and *reflection* upon those events. In a variety of formats—large group and small group—intergenerational learning provides variety of activities to address all ages: developmentally-appropriate, experiential, multisensory, and interactive.

Second, adult faith formation can connect adult-specific programming with engagement in the intergenerational life and events of the faith community. For example:

- Adults would learn about worship and how to worship; experience Sunday worship with the faith community and practice worshipping; and live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives.
- Adults would learn about the Bible and how to read it, interpret it, and apply it to their lives; experience the Bible at Sunday worship and at home; and develop their own practice of Bible study and reading.
- Adults would learn about Jesus and the Christian tradition—teachings, history, practices, what it means for life today, and how to live the Christian faith; and experience the life of Jesus and the Christian tradition through participation in the events of church life, especially church year feasts and seasons.
- Adults would learn about prayer and spirituality and how to develop their spiritual lives through prayer and spiritual discipleship; experience the prayer life of the faith community; and develop their own practice of prayer and the spiritual disciplines.
- Adults would learn about the justice issues of our day and the biblical and church teachings on justice, service, and care for creation; experience acts of justice and service with the faith community—locally and globally; and engage in the practices of serving those in need, caring for creation, and working for justice—as individuals, with their peers, with their families, and with their church and other groups and organizations.

Third, adult faith formation can enhance intergenerational relationships and ministry in the community by:

- Incorporating intergenerational dialogues into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions. And then reversing the process and providing opportunities for the older adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Developing mentoring relationships between adults and children/youth, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvements, and confirmation mentors.
- Linking people of different generations (older-to-younger or younger-to-older) in the church who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to the other, such as midlife and older adults helping young adults and new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.
- Involving the community in praying for each generation, for example when people leave on a mission trip or retreat weekend or when people celebrate a milestone, such as the birth of a child, a marriage, a graduation, and a retirement.
- Organizing social and recreational activities that build intergenerational relationships, such as an intergenerational Olympics, a Friday night simple meal during Lent, or a summer film festival (maybe outdoors on a large screen).
- Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
- Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to support the efforts of groups who work directly with the poor.

- Developing intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God’s creation, and build peace.
- Sponsoring community-wide service projects that engage all ages.

Fourth, it is important to involve parents, grandparents, and the whole family in the intergenerational faith community where their participation in church life can become a “laboratory” for immersing them in the Christian tradition, Christian practices, and Christian way of life. Participation in intergenerational experiences helps to develop the faith of parents and grandparents and increases their confidence and competence for engaging in faith practices at home. Intergenerational participation creates a shared experienced—often missing from everyday life—of families learning together, sharing faith, praying together, serving, and celebrating rituals and traditions. Families learn the knowledge and skills for sharing faith, celebrating traditions, and practicing the Christian faith at home and in the world, and they receive encouragement for continued family faith practice at home. Congregations can then provide resources to help families share, celebrate, and practice their faith at home through the new digital technologies and media.

Family Programming in Adult Faith Formation

At each stage of adulthood there are significant family life issues and transitions that can be the focus of adult faith formation programming. Congregations can assist parents and grandparents in nurturing faith family life, developing their faith life, strengthening family strengths and assets, and developing skills for parenting. Congregations can develop targeted faith formation strategies for single-person families (and to non-kindred adults living together as a family). This is an important need for older adults whose spouse or partner has died and is not a single-person family.

First, congregations can focus on the whole family and design the eight faith-forming processes—with activities, practices, and resources—so that they can be embedded into the daily life of families. Provide a variety activities and resources for each of the eight faith-forming processes delivered in different formats, but especially in digital formats, that can reach families where they live and where they go. Congregations can connect with families anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time by using digital content delivered to their mobile devices (phones and tablets). Ask: How are we providing mobile content for a family to use at the dinner table, in the car, in the morning or at bedtime, or for a mom or dad to use while they wait for their children participating in sports, music, arts? This is possible today because of the abundance of faith forming digital content available.

Second, congregations can focus on parents and grandparents. *Parent faith formation* helps parents and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship and practice a vital and informed Christian faith. This can happen through parents’ and grandparents’ participation in intergenerational faith formation at church and participation in church life. It can also happen through targeted programs of theological and biblical formation for parents and grandparents—at church or online—in a variety of learning formats to make it easy for them to access the educational opportunities. *Parenting for faith growth training* develops parents’ and grandparents’ faith-forming skills, teaches them how to parent for faith growth, and demonstrates how to be a role model for children and adolescents in the Christian faith.

Third, congregations can strengthen family life by focusing on the assets that build strong families. In *The American Families Asset Study*, the Search Institute identified twenty-one key qualities, assets, which help all kinds of families become strong. When families have more of these research-based assets, the children, adolescents, and adults in the family do better in life. The Family Assets include:

1. *Nurturing Relationships*: positive communication, affection, emotional openness, encouragement for pursuing talents and interests

2. *Establishing Routines*: family meals, shared activities, meaningful traditions (holidays, rituals, celebrations), dependability
3. *Maintaining Expectations*: openness about tough topics, fair rules, defined boundaries, clear expectations, contributions to family
4. *Adapting to Challenges*: management of daily commitments, adaptability problem-solving, democratic decision-making
5. *Connecting to the Community*: neighborhood cohesion, relationship with others in the community, participating in enriching activities, supportive resources in the community

Fourth, congregation can assist parents and grandparents develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting. Parents and grandparents who demonstrate a close, warm, and affirming parenting style have higher religious transmission rates than cold, distant, or authoritarian parenting styles. In “What Makes a Good Parent?” Dr. Robert Epstein identifies the ten most effective child-rearing practices—all derived from published studies and ranked based on how well they predict a strong parent-child bond and children’s happiness, health and success.

1. *Love and affection*. Parents support and accept the child, are physically affectionate, and spend quality one-on-one time together.
2. *Stress management*. Parents take steps to reduce stress for themselves and their child, practice relaxation techniques, and promote positive interpretations of events.
3. *Relationship skills*. Parents maintain a healthy relationship with their spouse, significant other, or coparent and model effective relationship skills with other people.
4. *Autonomy and independence*. Parents treat their child with respect and encourage him or her to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.
5. *Education and learning*. Parents promote and model learning and provide educational opportunities for their child.
6. *Life skills*. Parents provide for their child, have a steady income, and plan for the future.
7. *Behavior management*. Parents make extensive use of positive reinforcement and punish only when other methods of managing behavior have failed.
8. *Health*. Parents model a healthy lifestyle and good habits, such as regular exercise and proper nutrition, for their child.
9. *Religion*. Parents support spiritual or religious development and participate in spiritual or religious activities.
10. *Safety*. Parents take precautions to protect their child and maintain awareness of the child’s activities and friends.

Missional Initiatives in Adult Faith Formation

Adult faith formation is *missional*—expanding and extending the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live and providing pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community

Barna Research asked the unchurched to rate how much influence thirty different approaches had on their interest in attending a church. The three approaches that seemed to have the most positive effect on the potential for returning to church were: 1) developing relationships (an invitation from a trusted friend), 2) an appealing event—such as a concert or seminar—hosted at the church, and 3) reputational appeal as reflected in ministries that serve the poor and providing mentoring and development for young people. Two additional ideas had moderate appeal: participating in a house church rather than conventional church ministry, and participating in a gathering of people from their same age group and general lifestyle (Barna and Kinnaman, 155–9).

First, missional faith formation involves developing targeted approaches and strategies designed around the particular needs and life situations of the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. Congregations can reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested by using adaptable strategies, such as the following:

- Develop community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
- Create a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page (and other social media) to connect with people.
- Connect with people's life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
- Connect with people during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, and more.
- Develop high quality, relationship-building events designed to draw people from the wider community into relationships with people from your church such as social events, concerts, service projects, and children's programs.
- Organize small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to faith-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
- Sponsor community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips that are open to everyone so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.
- Create digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars that are offered online.

Make contact with those not engaged in the church community by establishing third-place settings in the community that offer hospitality, build relationships, host spiritual conversations, provide programs and activities, and nourish the spiritual life of people. A third place is the ideal setting for groups to gather, each with its own focus. Some groups emphasize studying the Bible and deepening knowledge of the faith; others emphasize expressive and artistic activities (making music, creating art or writing poetry); others are organized around a lifestyle or common interest. Some are on a contemplative path (gathering for evening prayers or spiritual exercises), while others are on an active path (working at soup kitchens, tutoring kids, building houses). Program offerings can include spiritual formation programs, life-centered clinics and workshops (for example, marriage enrichment, parenting, divorce and separation, bereavement, life and career planning, financial planning, recovery programs, dealing with depression), and an "Introduction to the Christian Faith Course" (see next paragraph).

Second, congregations can provide pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community. Congregations need to develop intentional and deliberate faith formation approaches that move people from discovery to exploration to commitment. One example of this process is an "Introduction to the Christian faith" program—an opportunity for people to investigate the claims of the Christian faith in an informal, no pressure, nonjudgmental, and friendly environment. The emphasis is upon exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal setting and does not assume any background knowledge or belief in Christianity. It can be offered in a variety of settings, formats, and times. (Programs like *The Alpha Course* and *Living the Questions* are examples of this.)

The *Catechumenate* of the early church, now restored for the contemporary church, provides a guided process moving from evangelization (inquiry) to catechesis (formation) to spiritual discernment (during Lent) to a ritual celebration of commitment (Baptism-Eucharist-Confirmation at the Easter Vigil) to post-baptismal faith formation (mystagogy). The formation component provides a holistic learning process: formation through participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation, development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. The journey from inquiry through formation to commitment and a life of discipleship within a faith community is a process that can be applied to all types of situations and settings for people of all ages.

Third, congregations can offer an apprenticeship in discipleship for adults who want to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian way of life. An “apprenticeship process” is designed to help adults grow as disciples by helping them understand who God is, what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to live in the Christian community. An apprenticeship often incorporates one-on-one mentoring, small group sharing, personal study, prayer, and retreat experiences.

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