



Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

Volume 6.1

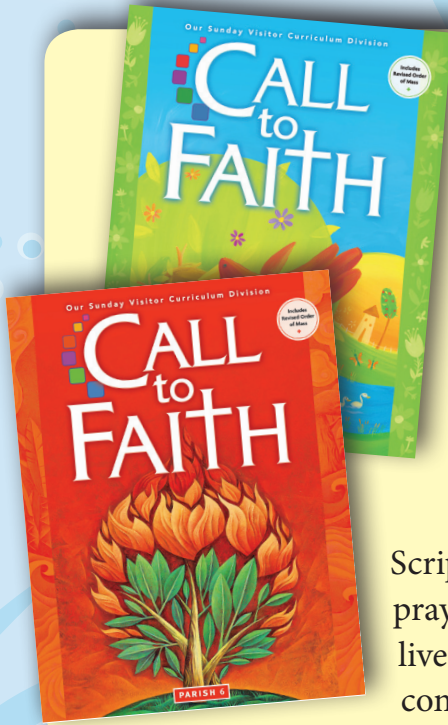
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Spring 2012



**THE ECOLOGIES *of*
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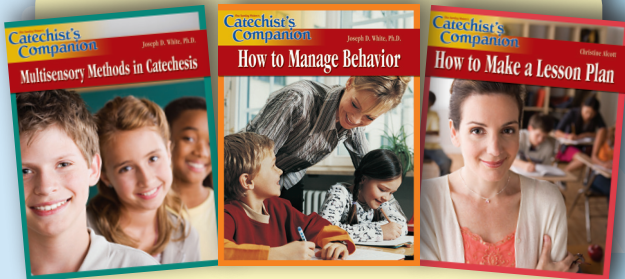


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Lifelong Faith Volume 6.1 – Spring 2012

Welcome to the first digital issue of **Lifelong Faith** on the theme of “Ecologies of Lifelong Faith Formation.” Over the next several issues I will be incorporating many of the new digital features, such as media, website pages, and links to additional articles and online content. With the digital journal you will be able to download the journal, print articles, and share the journal with your staff and leadership team.

The theme, **Ecologies of Lifelong Faith Formation**, is designed to help you explore important research findings describing the significant influence of three ecologies on nurturing and fostering Christian faith in all ages: the congregation and its culture, intergenerational community and relationships, and the family or household. To do this I am drawing upon major research studies of the past five years to provide you and your congregation with the research basis for more fully developing the power of these three contexts. As always practical strategies and tools to apply the research findings are incorporated throughout. This issue provides a variety of perspectives, not one model or framework, that can inform the practice of lifelong faith formation in your congregation. Although many of the articles focus on children and youth, the findings from these articles are applicable across the entire life span.

In **Congregations: Unexamined Crucibles for Spiritual Development** Eugene Roehlkepartain and Eboo Patel propose an ecological understanding of congregations as crucibles of spiritual development, based on the Search Institute’s multi-national research project on spiritual development in young people and on a survey of current research studies. In **The Importance of Congregational Culture for Lifelong Faith Formation** I revisit the research from the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” to suggest that the findings about congregational culture (congregational faith and life) can be applied to all ages and generations.

In **The Church Sticking Together** Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford provide a report on the findings from their major research project, the College Transition Project, to identify the significant contributions that intergenerational relationships in a faith community have for nurturing a “sticky faith” in young people and college students. In **The Importance of Intergenerational Community** I provide a variety of approaches for helping congregations become more intentionally intergenerational.

In **Sacred Matters—Religion & Spirituality in Families: Main Ideas in Sacred Theory** family researchers and theorists Wesley R. Burr, Loren D. Marks, and Randal D. Day present a conceptual framework and general theory (or model) about when, how, and why sacred matters are helpful in families, drawn from their own qualitative and quantitative research on families, as well as building on numerous other studies. The new **American Family Assets Study** from Search Institute introduces a new framework of Family Assets—relationships, interactions, opportunities, and values that help families thrive. In **The Importance of Family Faith for Lifelong Faith Formation** I provide a variety of approaches for strengthening family faith formation in your congregation.

I hope this issue stimulates your thinking about the ecologies of life faith formation and how you can strengthen their impact on the faith and life of all ages and generations.

John Roberto, Editor

Lifelong Faith is published quarterly by LifelongFaith Associates, LLC. ISSN #1939-5299

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Cover Design: Brian Parda

Digital Subscription Price: \$20 per year for 4 issues. Subscribe Online at <http://www.LifelongFaith.com>.
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Congregations as Complex Ecologies for Spiritual Development

Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and Eboo Patel

At their heart churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other congregations are cultures, ecologies, and communities within which spirituality is (or could be) intentionally nurtured. Although most offer programs and services for children and youth, their potential can only be understood and tapped when they are recognized as complex, dynamic, and multi-faceted ecologies or systems in which spiritual development is influenced through a web of relationships, rituals, expectations, and other interactions and processes across time.

In focusing on congregations as crucibles for spiritual development, it is important to shift the focus from seeing them as primarily deliverers of child and youth programs and services toward recognizing them as vibrant cultures that shape young people's socialization and that are shaped by young people's participation.

Congregations' cultures are shaped by their context, history, faith heritage, values, beliefs, location size, member demographics, facilities, and other factors that might be considered "givens," although they change slowly in response to both internal and external dynamics. Nancy Ammerman and her colleagues note that theological and denominational traditions—coupled with expectations from the culture, class, and similar factors—are shaped into a "unique creation, constructed out of their interaction over time."

Eugene C. Roehlkepartain is vice-president of the Search Institute, where he provides leadership for research, publishing, training, and consulting projects that focus on children, teens, and families.

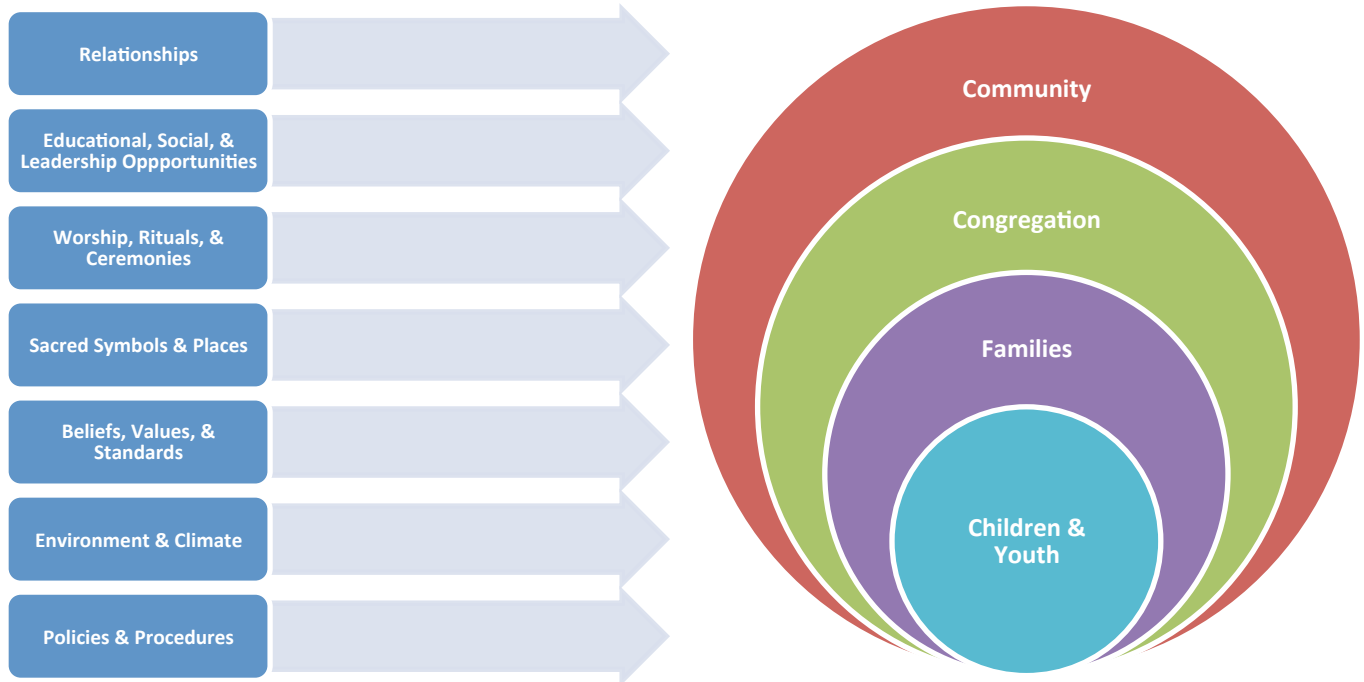
Eboo Patel is the founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core, where he leads projects that bring youth people from different faith communities together to do service projects.

(This article is excerpted from: "Congregations: Unexamined Crucibles for Spiritual Development" in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Edited by Eugene Roehlkepartain, Pamela Ebstyn King, Linda Wagener, and Peter L. Benson. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006. Reprinted with permission.)

A congregation's identity, history, and worldview have important bearings on how it engages with children and adolescents. For example those with a history and orientation that emphasize orthodoxy and conformity will likely have much different attitudes toward youth empowerment, dialogue, and teaching methods than those that emphasize

self-discovery and faith exploration. Thus understanding a congregation's national, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and ideological context—and how these factors interact with individuals' own beliefs, values, and spiritual journey—would yield insight into the person-environmental interaction in spiritual development.

Congregations as Complex Ecologies for Spiritual Development



Dynamics and Settings

The right side of the model (above) articulates a variety of settings or points of contact and dynamics within congregations that potentially influence child and adolescent spiritual development.

Congregations potentially influence, directly or indirectly, young people's spiritual development through multiple points of contact. These certainly include age-specific opportunities for children and youth (religious education, youth groups, service projects, etc.), but they also extend to include the congregation's engagement with families, intergenerational engagement, and broader community involvement through the

congregation's public leadership, service, and action on behalf of children, adolescents, and others in society. In addition, congregations also can play a role in young people's spiritual nurture by building the capacity and sense of responsibility among everyone in the congregation (leaders, parents, other adults, peers) to be attentive to nurturing the spiritual lives of children and adolescents—not only through their leadership in congregational programs, but also throughout congregational life, in families, and in the community. Indeed, much of congregations' potential capacity to socialize young people spiritually may, in fact, lie beyond children and youth programming.

Congregational Dynamics

A number of dynamics (on the left side of the model) occur across all of these points of contact that have the potential to enrich understanding of the processes by which congregations may influence young people's spiritual development. The following elements likely shape these processes:

- ***Sacred Symbols and Space:*** At the center of most religious traditions are sacred symbols, such as the cross for Christians, the Torah for Jews, the Qur'an for Muslims, and altars or shrines in many religious traditions. Congregations convey the importance of these symbols and provide a space for the faith community to convene in reverence of these symbols. Further, the "sacred spaces" of congregations—from austere meetinghouses to ornate cathedrals and shrines—are an important part of the sense of transcendence and sacredness within religious life.
- ***Relationships:*** Meaningful relationships may be the primary vehicle through which congregations influence young people's spiritual development. Within congregations, people of all generations can come together for mutual support, sharing of values, vision, and beliefs, and shared action and practices. Children and adolescents have opportunities to build sustained relationships with "sages of faith" and to form positive support peer relationships. Through relationships, the faith community transmits its values, beliefs, and practices, and young people have the opportunity to structure relational networks that facilitate more informal and effective oversight and control of youth by adults who care about them.
- ***Environment and Climate:*** What a congregation "feels like" plays an important, if intangible, role in its spiritual

nurture of children and adolescents. Congregations are more likely, for example, to nurture faith when they have a climate that is warm and caring, encourages thinking, expects service to others, and has minimal conflict. On the other hand, one can easily name negative climate attributes (e.g., mistrust, a lack of intellectual openness or honesty, uninviting space) that suppress, misdirect, or even derail spiritual development.

- ***Beliefs, Values, and Standards:*** The overall vision that permeates congregational life plays an important role in how the congregation nurtures spiritual development. That vision—connected to the faith tradition's idea of the transcendent and nurtured through a range of rituals, ceremonies, and other congregational activities—becomes integral to the congregation's identity. Identity development is often considered a primary function of religious involvement in childhood and adolescence and young people are likely to have their identities impacted by this process. Furthermore, a shared moral vision is integral to the building to the building of social capital within a congregational context. In addition, through their educational and formative experiences, congregations translate these beliefs, values, and standards into worldviews, language, and stories that answer ultimate questions of meaning, purpose, and vocation.
- ***Worship, Rituals, and Ceremonies:*** At the heart of most congregations is worship or other forms of connection to the transcendent. From daily prayers, music, services, devotional practices, and other religious acts (e.g., sacraments) to once-in-a-lifetime ceremonies, pilgrimages, and rites of passage, rituals define the congregation and the people who participate in them. Through their patterning, sequencing, and repetition,

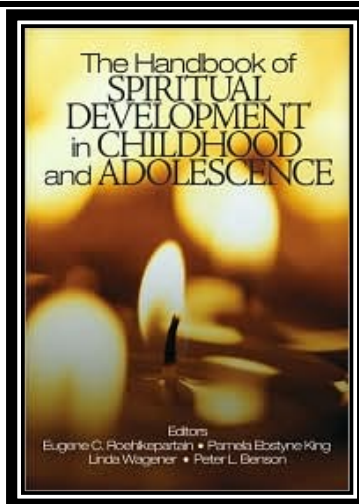
worship and other rituals separate the sacred from the profane, creating new cognitive schemas and profound emotional meaning. Rituals also socialize both children and adolescents into their tradition's narratives, beliefs, and practices, giving them the language, form, and structure needed to understand experiences of transcendence.

- **Educational, Social, and Leadership Opportunities:** Congregations provide a wide range of programs and activities that involve children and/or adolescents. Structured learning (religious education); social service, or missions; and recreational activities provide significant contexts for nurturing spiritual development. Although each program may have a different focus and structure, many provide young people with opportunities to learn spiritual disciplines, build relationships, develop personal competencies, and contribute to the community—all of which can be formative in spiritual development. Crucially, congregational youth programs often have high levels of youth participation and leadership. By becoming involved, young people not only grow and develop, they also gain immediate opportunities to have an impact on their immediate

congregation, and on the wider world through their congregation.

- **Policies and Processes:** To understand how congregations can or do nurture spiritual development, one must understand the ways in which policies and processes either facilitate or inhibit the nurturing of spiritual growth. Congregational policies and processes involve both formal and informal ways things happen in a congregation, including how decisions are made; how adults are equipped to guide young people; resources used in religious education; how young people are protected from harm; and many other dynamics. Each of these processes and policies can have either a positive or negative impact on spiritual nurture.

A crucible is a “place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development” (*Merriam Webster’s Online Dictionary*). Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other congregations can, in fact, be that kind of crucible for child and adolescent spiritual development. In a time of growing pluralism and fragmentation, congregations may actually be significant resources for spiritual development.



The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence

Edited by Eugene Roehlkepartain, Pamela Ebstyn King, Linda Wagener, and Peter Benson
(Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006)

The Handbook, a collection of academic and research-oriented essays on spiritual development, is organized into six parts: 1) Foundations, 2) Descriptive Approaches, 3) Spirituality and Human Development, 4) Ecologies of Spiritual Development, 5) Development Outcomes, and 6: Toward the Future. For congregational leaders the essays on the “Ecologies of Spiritual Development” (ethnicity, family, mentors, and congregations) will be very helpful.

For more information go to [Sage Publications](http://www.sagepub.com).



The Importance of Congregational Culture for Lifelong Faith Formation

John Roberto

The most striking finding in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry,” as reported in *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*, was the role that congregational culture plays in nurturing the faith of young people and in the effectiveness of the church’s youth ministry. The focus of the study was on the processes that contributed to developing committed Christian young people, but the findings on the importance of congregational faith and family/household faith can be applied to faith formation across the life span.

While confirming the power of several well known youth ministry practices, the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” pointed to a congregational culture of the Spirit—something more basic and central in establishing vital faith in children, youth, and adults (as evidenced by the survey results from the parents of young people). The research points to the value of a congregation’s culture endowed with a sense of the living, active presence of God at work among 1) the people of the whole congregation, 2) the ministries of the congregation,

John Roberto is the editor of the *Lifelong Faith* journal, author of *Faith Formation 2020*, and co-author of *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*.

(This article is developed from the research presented in *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* by Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto. St Paul: EYM Publications, 2010.)

3) the age-group ministries, 4) the adults (parents), and 5) congregational leadership, as providing the most powerful, pervasive influence these congregations have on young people long-term. It is the communal awareness of participation in God's presence and action that permeates the values, relationships, and activities of these congregations, giving rise to an atmosphere, a culture of the Spirit focused on mission and the transformation of life that seems to make them so influential in the lives and faith of young people and adults (parents).

At the heart of this culture of the Spirit is the belief that God is present, active, and alive in everything they do. These are congregations that live their belief that Jesus Christ is present and graciously at work in and through the body of Christ for the sake of the salvation of the world. Their commitment: We, his disciples, his Church are called to pass on faith and call people of all ages to discipleship, witness and service. From these shared beliefs and commitments flow the practices of ministry.

What Is Congregational Culture?

A dictionary would define *culture* as the sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguish one group of people from another. Its root meaning is shared with the word *agriculture*, referring to the soil that has been tilled and by extension a set of traits that have been plowed into a group's way of life. Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art.

In *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out*, Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro write, "The idea of church culture is often ignored, in part because so little material is available about it. Yet we believe *culture is to the church what a soul is to the human body*. It is an overall life force that the Holy Spirit uses to give energy,

personality, and uniqueness to everything a body of believers says and does." (xxi) Church culture influences everything you do. It colors the way you choose and introduce programs. It shapes how you select and train leaders. "Your culture is the lens through which you view your life. If you change the lens, you change your outlook. Changing the culture, and everything else changes, including the future." (xxi)

Nancy T. Ammerman, professor of sociology at Boston University, has researched and written extensively about American congregations and the role of congregational culture. In her essay "Culture and Identity in the Congregation," she explains what a congregational culture is:

Culture is who we are and the world we have created to live in. It is the predictable patterns of who does what and habitual strategies for telling the world about the things held most dear. A culture includes the congregation's history and stories of its heroes. It includes its symbols, rituals, and worldview. It is shaped by the cultures in which its members live (represented by their demographic characteristics), but it takes on its own unique identity and character when those members come together. Understanding a congregation requires understanding that it is a unique gathering of people with a cultural identity all its own.

Congregations draw their culture and identity from their specific religious tradition. What each congregation cooks up, then, is always a mix of local creativity and larger tradition. What we see in a given locale is that group's selective retrieval of their own theological heritage, along with the local inventions that have been necessary to make sense of life in that place. . .

A congregational culture is constructed out of theological and denominational

traditions, expectations from the larger culture, patterns of social class and ethnicity, and the like. All those things are carried into the congregation by its members and leaders. Whenever any of those elements changes, the congregation will inevitably change as well.

Congregational culture is more than the sum of what people bring with them and more than a mirror image of the theological tradition they represent. It is a unique creation, constructed out of their interaction together over time. (Ammerman, 78-82)

The dynamics of congregational culture at work can be seen in this analysis of the genius of black congregations by Robert Michael Franklin in his essay “The Safest Place on Earth: The Culture of Black Congregations.”

In order to understand the genius of black congregations, it is important to understand how the congregation’s entire culture does the work of empowering parishioners for mission. Central to that cultural work is the pivotal role of pastoral leadership in its manifestation of theological convictions, rhetorical skills, and practical wisdom. Most portraits of black congregations emphasize the role of clergy. This is understandable, given the elevated office of ministry in most black communities. A more careful examination of black congregational culture, however, requires attention to the array of practices that are sustained by the *laity*—style of worship, singing, ecstatic rituals (shouting, altar prayer), and politically relevant religious education. Effective congregational mission actually flows from the dynamic *interaction* between qualified, gifted leadership and an empowering congregational culture. Black clergy are, in the first instance, servants called to nurture and maintain a healthy congregational culture. Once progress in

this task has been demonstrated, then they may be authorized in the public arena. (258)

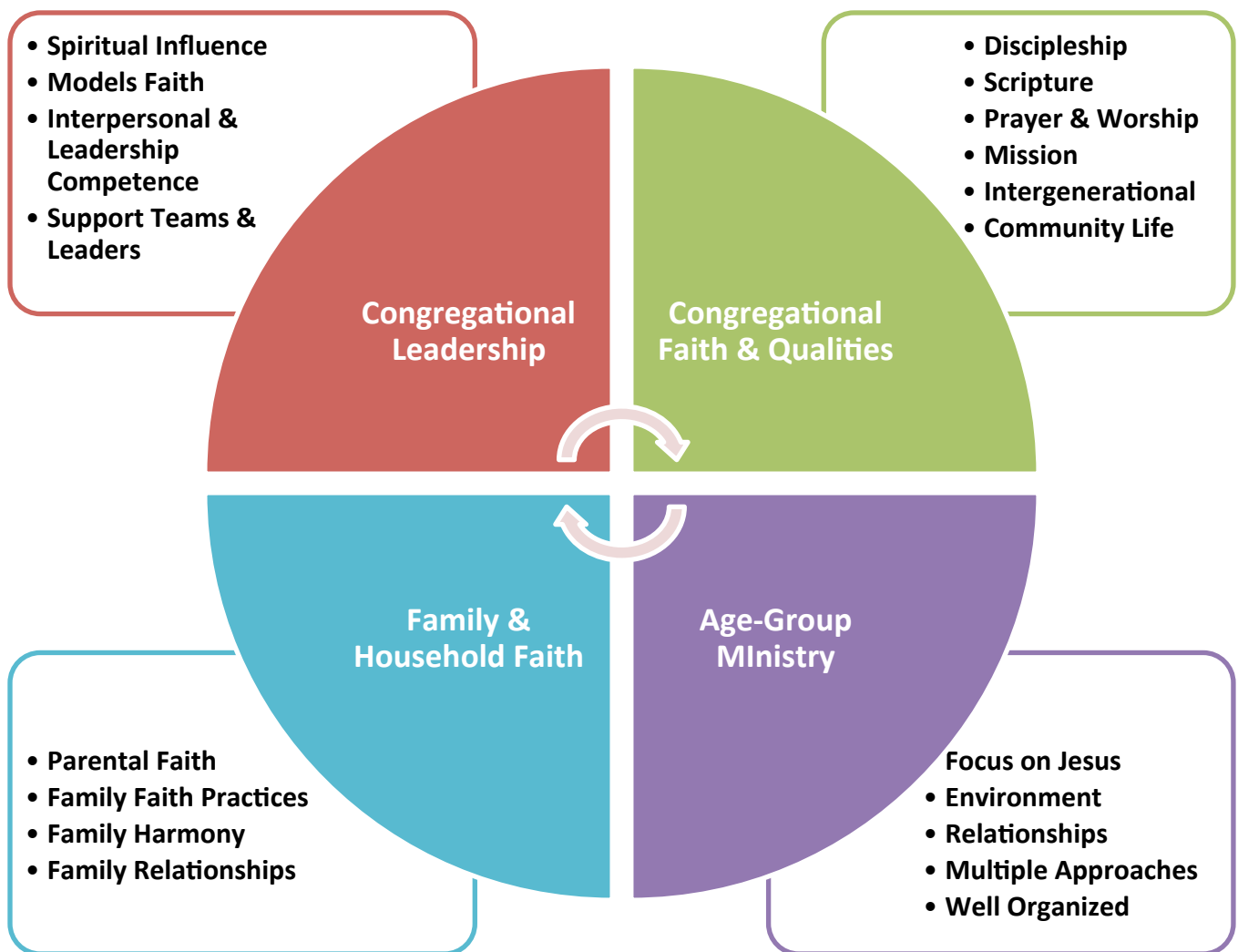
The characteristics of black congregational culture include: (1) full engagement of the senses in worship, (2) intimate prayer, (3) cathartic shouting, (4) triumphant singing, (5) politically relevant religious education, and (6) prophetic, imaginative preaching.

The entire culture of the black church thus works to create the sensibilities necessary for public mission. Black church culture is a rich and vibrant ensemble of practices that offer praise to God and hope to oppressed humanity. Clergy are expected first to maintain and then to mobilize this culture for Christ’s mission in the world. Maintenance and mobilization are dialectically related.

Preaching is the ecclesial practices most central to the sacred oral culture of African Americans and most essential for mobilizing and sustaining people for public action. Good black social preaching names and frames crises creatively, analyzes them in biblical perspective, describes solutions using indigenous symbols and images, prescribes specific plans, and offers hope via celebration. (Franklin, 258)

A Congregational Culture of Faith Formation

The “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” found that congregational culture generates four spheres of relationships and practices that intersect and powerfully impact the faith of young people and the whole congregation: 1) Congregational Faith and Qualities, 2) Age-Group Ministries, 3) Faith and Household Faith, and 4) Congregational Leadership.



Congregational Faith and Qualities

What kind of congregational faith and life nurtures youth and adults of committed Christian faith? The central insight of the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” is that the *faith and life of the congregation makes a huge difference.*

Congregational Faith and Qualities describe the values and dynamics of the intergenerational life and ministry of the whole congregation. These 18 characteristics (described as “Faith Assets” in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry”) describe aspects of the congregation’s theological orientation, faith maturity, values, attitudes, and practices that bear directly on

its capacity to engage and influence the faith of individuals and families.

Congregational Faith

These characteristics focus on the congregation’s theological commitments and the strategic decisions and patterns of ministry that flow from those theological commitments.

1. **Experiencing God’s Living Presence:** The congregation possesses a sense of God’s living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.

2. **Making Faith Central:** The congregation recognizes and participates in God’s sustaining and transforming life and work. The congregation helps people learn who God is and come to know Jesus personally. The congregation teaches people how to be a Christian, how to discover the meaning of the Bible for their lives, and how to pray
3. **Emphasizing Prayer:** The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship. The congregation provides spiritually uplifting worship experiences that are enlightening, fulfilling, inspiring, interesting, easy to understand, and relevant in daily life.
4. **Focusing on Discipleship:** The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ. The congregation brings the Gospel to people outside the church.
5. **Emphasizing Scripture:** The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission. The congregation makes mission and evangelism, i.e., bringing the Gospel to people outside the church, important in church life.
6. **Making Mission Central:** The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice. The congregation teaches people about Christian perspectives on moral questions and helps people learn how to apply their faith to decisions about what’s right and wrong. The congregation involves people in helping others through community service, making use of each member’s talents and abilities within the

congregation and in the community and world.

These six characteristics are supported by findings from the study. Youth, parents, and adult leaders in youth ministry rated the following congregational activities as most significant in expressing and living the congregation’s faith. Notice the shared perceptions among youth, parents, and adult leaders in youth ministry. A strong faith-filled congregational culture benefits young people and adults. (Rating based on a 9 point scale.)

Characteristics of Congregational Faith	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Congregation’s Biblical Emphasis	7.16	-	-
Congregation’s Moral Guidance	6.60	6.81	6.96
Teaches Core Christian Concepts	-	6.95	-
Worship Services’ Positive Characteristics	6.29	6.27	6.40
Congregation Promotes Service	6.40	6.42	6.43
Congregation’s Mission Outreach	6.71	-	6.04

Congregational Qualities

The ten Congregational Qualities reflect values, expectations and practices of the whole community that influence the life and faith of young people and adults.

7. **Supporting Youth (and Age-Group) Ministries:** Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.
8. **Demonstrating Hospitality:** The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth. The congregation is friendly and feels warm; it helps members make friends at church and feel at home. The congregation accepts people who are different and makes them feel welcome.

9. **Striving for Excellence:** The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement. The congregation is willing to change the way things are done to increase involvement with the church; it is innovative—demonstrating openness to the suggestions from members and the freedom to try new ideas.
10. **Encouraging Thinking:** The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life. The congregation challenges people to think about religious issues and ideas; and encourages them to ask questions and say what they think on religious issues.
11. **Creating Community:** Congregational life reflects high quality personal and group relationships. The congregation puts an emphasis on providing love, support, and friendship to members, especially those who are experiencing hardships.
12. **Encouraging Small Groups:** The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.
13. **Promoting Worship:** The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship. The congregation provides spiritually uplifting worship experiences that are enlightening, fulfilling, inspiring, interesting, easy to understand, and relevant in daily life.
14. **Fostering Ethical Responsibility:** The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility. The congregation teaches people about Christian

perspectives on moral questions and helps people learn how to apply their faith to decisions about what's right and wrong.

15. **Promoting Service:** The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally. The congregation involves people in helping others through community service, making use of each member's talents and abilities within the congregation and in the community and world
16. **Demonstrating Effective Practices:** The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.
17. **Participating in the Congregation:** Youth and adults are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.
18. **Assuming Ministry Leadership:** Youth and adults are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.

These twelve characteristics are supported by findings from study. The strength of the Congregational Qualities demonstrates the content and force of the church's influence in the lives of its members. Again, notice how the perceptions of congregational life are shared by parents and adult leaders. A strong congregational culture benefits everyone! (Rating based on a 9 point scale.)

Congregational Qualities	Youth	Parents	Adult Leaders
Warm, Challenging Climate	7.05		
Welcoming Atmosphere		6.96	7.21
Satisfied with the Congregation	6.93		
Importance of this Church to Me		7.73	7.96
Congregation's Moral Guidance	6.60	6.81	6.96

Congregation's Social Interaction	6.55	5.18	5.22
Congregation's Openness	6.35		
Members Experience Love and Support		6.92	

A Congregational Culture that Promotes and Nurtures Committed Christian Youth and Adults

In the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” we found congregations that contributed significantly to a vital and living Christian faith in young people and adults. In these congregations we found committed Christian youth and adults (parents and adult leaders) who were growing in faith and living their faith in daily life. The following chart compares the highest youth and parent scores for many key characteristics of the Christian faith. (Rating based on a 9 point scale; NA = not asked.)

Characteristic of Christian Faith	Youth	Parents
I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again.	8.54	NA
I have had feelings of being in the presence of God.	8.08	8.12
I have a sense of being saved in Christ.	8.08	8.09
I want to be the kind of person who helps people.	8.01	NA
The kind of moral decisions I make now will affect my future happiness.	7.57	8.31
My faith helps me know right from wrong.	7.44	8.24
God helps me decide what is right or wrong behavior.	7.33	7.88
My life is filled with meaning and purpose.	7.31	7.33
The active presence of God in my life has a positive influence on my religious faith.	7.22	NA
Religious faith is important in my life. (I am a religious person.)	7.20	7.37

My life is committed to Jesus Christ.	7.17	7.72
I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation.	7.03	7.89
I have found a way of life that gives me direction.	6.92	7.22
The Bible is a positive influence on my faith.	6.88	NA
Worship services at my church have a positive influence on my religious faith.	6.83	NA
I have a real sense that God is guiding me.	6.51	7.30
I am involved in activities of service related to church, community, or world.	6.51	NA
I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.	6.33	6.65
I talk with other people about my faith.	6.30	6.42
I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.	6.28	6.87
I pray, have devotions, or meditate, either alone or with others.	6.11	NA
I give significant portions of time and money to help other people.	6.12	6.12
I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.	5.87	6.65
I have a sense of sharing in a great purpose.	NA	8.20

The youth and parents in the study possess and practice a vital and informed Christian faith—understanding the Christian faith, participating in worship, praying, and engaging in service and mission. They are committed to Jesus Christ and experience the presence of God in their daily lives and relationships with others. Their faith helps them decide what is right or wrong and take responsibility for serving those in need. Parents in the study seek out opportunities to grow spiritually. The overwhelming majority of parents are involved in spiritual support groups in their churches. They reported that they belonged to at least one church group in which others will prayer with them and for them as needed (7.23); in at least one church group in which they can talk about spiritual issues (6.99); and in at least one church group

in which it is possible to talk about personal problems (5.88).

The Power of an Intergenerational Faith Community

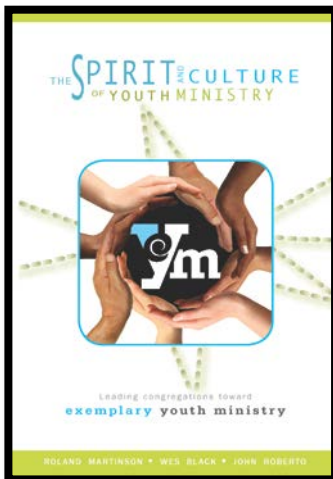
What was pervasive and unique in these congregations was the presence and power of quality *intergenerational relationships* and a *deeply bonded intergenerational faith community* and their impact on the faith and lives of young people, parents, and adults. These youth were surrounded by multiple, reinforcing spheres of relational Christian influence. They were immersed in a larger, multi-generational community of quality relationships informed by faith in Jesus Christ.

In these congregations getting to know a personal and present God involves more than learning dogma or obeying a particular set of rules. These young people come to know a living and active God through relationships with God and the community. Certainly, young people learn the Gospel, the story of

Christ, his teachings, and the rich and substantive Christian traditions. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Him. ***The power of faithful, multi-generational Christian relationships is at the heart of a congregational culture that develops and nurtures Christian faith in all ages and generations.***

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The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry

Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto
St Paul: EYM Publications, 2010.

Congregations can indeed nurture youth to a vital Christian faith! Based on a national research study, *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* provides insights into what congregations are doing to foster a vibrant, committed Christian Faith in the lives of youth people. At the heart of the study's findings is a congregational Culture of the Spirit— that permeates the values, relationships, and activities of a congregation, giving rise to a culture of mission and transformation that makes a congregation highly influential in the lives and faith of young people. This active presence of God surrounds the people of the whole congregation in its ministries with youth, parents, community, and leaders.

Order from the [Lifelong Faith Store](http://www.lifelongfaithstore.com).
Exemplary Youth Ministry Website: <http://www.exemplarym.com>

Exploring Your Congregational Culture

Congregational Faith

- How do you see your congregation living these 6 qualities of Congregational Faith? Identify specific illustrations for each quality.
- In what ways do each of these six qualities nurture and sustain people in the Christian faith?
- Which are the strongest qualities? How can you continue to enhance these?
- Which are the qualities that need attention? How can you develop these?

1. **God's Living Presence:** possesses a sense of God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service
2. **Centrality of Faith:** recognizes and participates in God's sustaining and transforming life and work
3. **Emphasizes Prayer:** practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship
4. **Focus on Discipleship:** committed to know and following Jesus Christ
5. **Emphasizes Scripture:** values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission
6. **Centrality of Mission:** consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice

Congregational Life

- How do you see your congregation living these 12 qualities of Congregational Life? Identify specific illustrations for each quality.
- In what ways do each of these 12 qualities nurture and sustain people in the Christian faith?
- Which are the strongest qualities? How can you continue to enhance these?
- Which are the qualities that need attention? How can you develop these?

7. **Supports Age-Group Ministry:** age-group ministry (children, youth, young adults, adults) are high priorities
8. **Demonstrates Hospitality:** values and welcomes all people
9. **Strives for Excellence:** sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement
10. **Encourages Thinking:** welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life
11. **Creates Community:** reflects high quality personal and group relationships
12. **Encourages Support Groups:** engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life
13. **Promotes Worship:** expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship through the congregation's life
14. **Fosters Ethical Responsibility:** encourages individual and social moral responsibility
15. **Promotes Service:** sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally
16. **Demonstrates Effective Practices:** engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities
17. **Participate in the Congregation:** all ages are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices
18. **Assume Ministry Leadership:** youth and adults are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities

The 44 Faith Assets from the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry”

(The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry by Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto. St Paul: EYM Publications, 2010.)

Congregational Faith

- Asset 1. Experiences God’s Living Presence:** The congregation possesses a sense of God’s living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.
- Asset 2. Makes Faith Central:** The congregation recognizes and participates in God’s sustaining and transforming life and work.
- Asset 3. Emphasizes Prayer:** The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship.
- Asset 4. Focuses on Discipleship:** The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ.
- Asset 5. Emphasizes Scripture:** The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission.
- Asset 6. Makes Mission Central:** The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice.

Congregational Qualities

- Asset 7. Supports Youth Ministry:** Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.
- Asset 8. Demonstrates Hospitality:** The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth.,
- Asset 9. Strives for Excellence:** The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement.
- Asset 10. Encourages Thinking:** The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life.
- Asset 11. Creates Community:** Congregational life reflects high quality personal and group relationships.
- Asset 12. Encourages Small Groups:** The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.
- Asset 13. Promotes Worship:** The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship.
- Asset 14. Fosters Ethical Responsibility:** The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility.
- Asset 15. Promotes Service:** The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally.
- Asset 16. Demonstrates Effective Practices:** The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.
- Asset 17. Participate in the Congregation:** Youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.
- Asset 18. Assume Ministry Leadership:** Youth are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.

Youth Ministry Qualities

- Asset 19. Establishes a Caring Environment:** Youth ministry provides multiple nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.
- Asset 20. Develops Quality Relationships:** Youth ministry develops authentic relationships among youth and adults establishing an environment of presence and life engagement.
- Asset 21. Focuses on Jesus Christ:** Youth ministry’s mission, practices, and relationships are inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.
- Asset 22. Considers Life Issues:** Youth ministry values and addresses the full range of young people’s lives.

Asset 23. Uses Many Approaches: Youth ministry intentionally and creatively employs multiple activities appropriate to the ministry's mission and context.

Asset 24. Is Well Organized and Planned: Youth ministry engages participants and leaders in long range planning, implementation, evaluation, and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations.

Family and Household Faith Assets

Asset 25. Possesses Strong Parental Faith: Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith.

Asset 26. Promotes Family Faith Practices: Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life.

Asset 27. Reflects Family Harmony: Family members' expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith.

Asset 28. Equips Parents: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equips parents for nurturing faith at home.

Asset 29. Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.

Leadership

Pastor

Asset 30. Exercises Spiritual Influence: The pastor knows and models the transforming presence of God in life and ministry.

Asset 31. Demonstrates Interpersonal Competence: The pastor builds a sense of community and relates well with adults and youth.

Asset 32. Supports Youth Ministry: The pastor understands, guides, and advocates for youth ministry.

Asset 33. Supports Leaders: The pastor affirms and mentors youth and adults leading youth ministry.

Youth Minister

Asset 34. Provides Competent Leadership: The youth minister reflects superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill in leadership.

Asset 35. Models Faith: The youth minister is a role model reflecting a living faith for youth and adults.

Asset 36. Mentors Faith Life: The youth minister assists adult leaders and youth in their faith life both one-on-one and in groups.

Asset 37. Develops Teams: The youth minister reflects a clear vision and attracts gifted youth and adults into leadership.

Asset 38. Knows Youth: The youth minister knows youth and the changes in youth culture, and utilizes these understandings in ministry.

Asset 39. Establishes Effective Relationships: The youth minister enjoys effective relationships with youth, parents, volunteers, and staff.

Youth and Adult Leaders

Asset 40. Are Equipped for Peer Ministry: Youth practice friendship, care-giving, and outreach and are supported by ministry training and caring adults.

Asset 41. Establish Adult-Youth Mentoring: Adults engage youth in the Christian faith and life supported by informed leadership.

Asset 42. Participate in Training: Youth and adults are equipped for ministry in an atmosphere of high expectations.

Asset 43. Possess Vibrant Faith: Youth and adult leaders possess and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.

Asset 44. Demonstrate Competent Adult Leadership: Adults foster authentic relationships and utilize effective practices in youth ministry with a clear vision strengthened by training and support.



The Church Sticking Together

Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford

Wouldn't it be great to find the youth ministry silver bullet? Neither of us has seen (or used) an actual silver bullet. In our culture today, the silver bullet has become synonymous for a sure thing.

The problem is, sure things in youth ministry are rare. Programs come and go, as do communication channels and strategies for reaching kids on the margins. Who would have guessed the power of online social media a few years back or the number of middle schoolers in our groups who use smart phones?

While sure things are rare, one phenomenon that is not as rare as we would hope is students leaving the faith after they graduate from our youth ministries. As we have examined other research, our conclusion is that 40 to 50 percent of kids who are connected to a youth group when they graduate high school will fail to stick with their faith in college.¹

Let's translate that statistic to the kids in your youth ministry.

Imagine the seniors in your youth ministry standing in a line and facing you. Now, imagine that you ask them to count off by twos, just like you used to do on the playground to divide into teams. The ones will stick with their faith; the twos will shelve it.

In an effort to understand this drop off as well as give youth leaders, churches and families tools they need to help kids develop more lasting faith, we at the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) launched the College Transition Project. As we were planning our College Transition Project six years ago,² our FYI research team hoped to find *one thing* that youth workers could do that would be the silver bullet for sticky faith; the one thing that would develop long-term faith in students. We hoped to find one element of youth ministry programming (e.g., small groups, mentoring, justice work) that would be significantly related to higher faith maturity in students.

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(This article can be found online at <http://stickyfaith.org>. This article was adapted from *Sticky Faith, Youth Worker Edition* by Kara Powell, Brad Griffin and Cheryl Crawford. Zondervan 2011).

This silver bullet would launch our high school graduates on a journey of faith that would help them not only survive but thrive across the transition to college and life beyond.

We haven't found that silver bullet. While small groups, mentoring, justice work, leadership and a host of other youth ministry programs are important, the reality is that kids, ministry programs and spiritual development are far more complex than that.

Intergenerational Stickiness

It turns out that intergenerational relationships are one key to building lasting faith in students. Silver bullet? No. Helpful if we want students to live their faith beyond high school? Absolutely.

Sadly, many high school students lack these significant relationships. In our effort to offer relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching and fellowship for teenagers, we have segregated (and we use that verb intentionally but not lightly) students from the rest of the church. In interviews and open-ended survey questions, participants shared reflections like this one: "The students seemed to be very separated from the rest of the congregation. Maybe fixing that gap would help unite the church."

That segregation causes students to shelve their faith. Our study of nearly 500 youth group graduates from around the country has revealed the following important insights about the power of intergenerational relationships in building sticky faith.

Intergenerational Insight #1:
Involvement in all-church worship during high school is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college than any other form of church participation.

The closest our research has come to that definitive silver bullet is this sticky finding: High school and college students who experience more intergenerational worship tend to have higher faith maturity. Of the many youth group participation variables we examined, involvement in intergenerational worship and relationships had one of the most robust correlations with faith maturity. This is true for our students' senior year of high school and their freshman year of college.

Intergenerational Insight #2: ***The more students serve and build relationships with younger children, the more likely it is that their faith will stick.***

Granted, some of your teenagers opt to serve in children's ministry because they want to avoid going to the regular service. And sure, others volunteer because their schools require service hours.

Yet, even in the midst of these mixed motives, the high school students we surveyed who served in middle school or children's ministry seemed to have stickier faith in college. Part of that is probably due to the type of student who is likely to volunteer to serve younger children, but nonetheless, more than just babysitting, being involved in children's ministry seems to be faith building.

Intergenerational Insight #3: ***High school seniors don't feel supported by adults in their congregations.***

As a research team, we weren't all that surprised that, of five major sources of support (adults in the congregation, parents, youth workers, friends in youth group and friends outside youth group), high school seniors ranked adults in the congregation last.

What did surprise us was how far behind they were the other four groups. One graduate reported that his church "would talk about having students involved, but they never really did." Another reflected that

church members “wanted nothing to do with us... I think they see us as kind of scary in that we’re the people on the news, you know, who are dealing drugs and getting pregnant and all those sort of things...keeping us separate and treating us like we were a hazard.”

Intergenerational Insight #4: *By far, the number-one way that churches made the teens in our survey feel welcomed and valued was when adults in the congregation showed interest in them.*

More than any single program or event, kids were far more likely to feel like a significant part of their local churches when adults made the effort to get to know them. One student beamed as he said, “We were welcomed not just in youth group; we were welcomed into other parts of the ministry of the church: the worship team on Sunday mornings, teaching Sunday school to kids and helping with cleaning and serving. All these other types of things really just brought the youth in and made them feel like they had a place and even feel like they were valued as individuals.”

Becoming a 5:1 Church

One of the goals we give churches that want to take sticky faith seriously is to reconsider the traditional 5:1 ratio.³ Many youth ministries say they want to have a 1:7 ratio of adults to kids on their winter retreats (meaning they want one adult for every seven kids), or a 1:5 ratio of adults to kids for their small groups. But what if we reversed that? What if we said we want a 5:1 adult-to-kid ratio in our youth ministries?

Before you panic because you think you’re now supposed to recruit five small-group leaders for every one kid and you’re already having a hard enough time recruiting one adult for every five kids, please relax. We’re not talking about five small-group leaders. We’re talking about five adults who are willing to commit to investing in one teenager

in little, medium and big ways. Here’s how we have seen churches embrace 5:1 through a variety of creative paths.

Put a 5:1 Twist on Existing Programs

The good news is that, as you intentionally move your programs toward 5:1, you don’t have to start from scratch. Your youth ministry and your church already host events that, with some careful planning, could easily become more intergenerational. Consider these possibilities:

- Invite an adult Sunday school class to join your students on their next mission trip.
- Invite students’ parents to your fall kick-off and prime your volunteers to invest relational time not only in students but parents too.
- Encourage your high school guys’ small groups to attend annual men’s events (crawfish boil, steak fry, chili cook-off, whatever your church does).
- Ask your women’s ministries if their upcoming events (like Saturday teas or ladies’ outings) can be geared for teenage and younger girls too.
- Ask if your senior adult ministry would be open to pairing up with teenagers for the next food pantry program.

The bottom line is that, if you plan ahead, you can capitalize on momentum from existing events instead of starting them all from scratch. Whenever possible, invite the larger church body to get on board with your 5:1 vision, and explain that the goal is to build lasting faith in students.

5:1 Teaching

If you’re serious about sticky inter-generational relationships, you probably will need to launch a few new catalysts for 5:1.

One excellent opportunity for new 5:1 dialogue is your Sunday teaching. Odds are good that you've got adults and kids sitting in Sunday school rooms, separated only by a few walls (and, as a youth worker, you hope those walls have really good sound insulation). What if you periodically removed those walls and invited kids and adults to experience God's Word together?

5:1 Worship

We've heard from many innovative churches about how they are involving students in congregational worship—often after many years of segregated Sunday programming. A few churches have even canceled Sunday morning youth ministry in order to bring generations together in worship.

A church from St. Louis we dialogued with recently wants adults and kids to experience the same worship service every week, yet they also want to make sure their teenagers feel connected to their peers. So, every Sunday after the intergenerational worship service ends, the high school students meet for 30-45 minutes to talk about how to live out the sermon that next week at school. That way, students know they'll have a focused, lively conversation every week with their friends.

In an effort to bring a sticky intergenerational flavor to their morning worship, one Denver church decided to make their youth choir the choir for the main Sunday morning service. They were initially concerned that the service would shrink down to teenagers and their parents, but the opposite happened. Their 11:00 worship service became one of the most popular services. Adults who had invested in those kids throughout their childhood and adolescent years couldn't wait to have the teenagers lead them in music worship.

We're not advocating that churches cancel their Sunday youth groups or disband their adult choirs. Churches must do what they feel is appropriate for their own contexts. Every church should ask the simple question, "How

can we increase adult-teen interaction during worship?"

5:1 Mentoring

Many churches include mentoring in their 5:1 paths. Through these empowering relationships, students are able to spend intentional time with adults who can impact and shape their spiritual journeys. The more adult mentors who seek out students and help them apply faith to daily life, the better. Among 13 different ways adults support high school kids, two variables stood out as significantly related to sticky faith over time: feeling sought out by adults and feeling like those adults "helped me to realistically apply my faith to my daily life."⁴ Especially as we wrestle with how to train our staff and adult volunteers, helping kids connect the dots between their faith and their everyday lives should take priority if we're looking for long-term impact.

On one all-church retreat we heard about, participants were encouraged to find one person from a different age group and strike up a conversation. Participants were challenged to keep this conversation going once a week for six weeks. Carlos, a ninth grader, and Belinda, his grandmother's age, connected on that retreat and committed to the six-week trial. Six months later, they still get together to talk regularly.

Some youth leaders, realizing that the adults in their congregation are too busy to meet regularly with a teenager, have offered less intensive 5:1 connections. One church in our Sticky Faith Learning Cohort in Pasadena is asking adults for a few hours per year to connect with a kid based on a mutual interest, such as gardening, cooking or auto repair.

Another Texas church in our cohort identified members who could meet weekly with graduating seniors for a few months. That limited time commitment created great success in connecting youth group students with innovative and godly congregation members of all ages.

Another church in our learning cohort has decided that they are already a multigenerational congregation—everyone gathers together in the same space at the same time. But they aren't satisfied with being multigenerational. They want to truly become *intergenerational*, focusing their worship, budget, priorities and language around what it means to connect with one another in mutuality across age groups. One practical way they are addressing this shift is changing the way they talk about mentoring. They've determined that mentor/mentee language can be a hindrance because it implies a multigenerational, top-down relationship. The kind of 5:1 relationships they hope to foster are rooted in mutual influence, where old and young shape one another in profound ways.

5:1 Rituals

San Clemente Presbyterian Church had already embraced the importance of intergenerational relationships before FYI started our research. As a result, while other churches are taking 5:1 baby steps, they are sprinting ahead.

When students graduate from sixth grade, they're presented with a Bible with inscriptions from their parents and other friends of the family. When those same students enter junior high, they are taken on a confirmation retreat and officially become members of the San Clemente body.

At the beginning of their senior year of high school, students hike to the top of Half Dome in Yosemite with the youth pastor, the youth ministry volunteers and the senior pastor. According to Dr. Tod Bolsinger, the senior pastor, "This tradition is so important, I have parents of elementary-age children telling me to keep in shape so I can take their children on this rite of passage hiking experience."⁵

At the end of their senior year, the church hosts a blessing ceremony for all high school students, graduating seniors, parents and

congregation members. These sorts of annual rituals shape both the DNA of the church as well as the sticky faith of the students.

The Role of Parents in 5:1

When we speak with groups of parents about 5:1, we often feel them look in the direction of their youth pastors, as if it's the leaders' job to build a 5:1 web for their kids. However, parents should assume the primary responsibility for linking their kids with five or more caring adults. The youth worker's role is to come alongside parents as partners in the process, only taking the lead when parents aren't able to create the needed 5:1 strands. A few months ago I (Kara) met a single mom who understood that she was ultimately responsible for surrounding her son with loving adults, especially men who could fill the void created by his absent father. This mom had a brilliant idea for helping her son visualize their family's sticky web. In the hallway between their bedrooms, this mom has hung a few large collage picture frames, each of which has several openings for pictures. As her son builds a relationship with an adult—especially with a man—she takes a picture of her son with that adult. Then she places those pictures in her frames to remind them of the amazing adults already surrounding their family. The blank picture frames that are yet unfilled reinforce that there are more enriching 5:1 relationships still to come.

Help parents connect the dots between their kids' faith and the influence their kids' coaches, teachers and neighbors have on them from week to week. When we meet with our own kids' teachers for parent-teacher conferences, we now share our vision for bringing adults around our kids to help them flourish in all of life and ask how we can support their roles within that web. Another parent told us that she has committed to gather the parents of all the kids in her son's small group at the beginning of each school year for a barbecue. She wants to encourage

them to pray together for their kids and to begin to look for ways to invite each other into the circles of influence around their kids.

From Silver Bullets to Red Rover

Building sticky faith in young people is a complex process. But as they are released into a web of relationships where they are shaped and changed by the lives of the people in your congregation, research shows encouraging signs that this helps faith stick. Think of your 5:1 strategy like a targeted Red Rover game, where you exercise your passion as a youth leader to call upon adults you know and trust to enter the very high calling of shaping the life of a student. No silver bullet. No magic wand. Just living out Jesus' call to make disciples.

Notes

¹ In September 2006, the Barna Group released their observation that “the most potent data regarding disengagement is that a majority of twentysomethings—61 percent of today’s young adults—had been churched at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged” (Barna Update, “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years,” The Barna Group, September 16, 2006). According to a Gallup Poll, approximately 40 percent of eighteen-to twenty-nine-year olds who attended church at age sixteen or seventeen are no longer attending (George H. Gallup, Jr. “The Religiosity Cycle,” The Gallup Poll, October 19, 2006. Frank Newport, “A Look at Religious Switching in America Today,” The Gallup Poll, October 19, 2006. A 2007 survey by LifeWay Research of over one thousand adults ages eighteen to thirty who spent a year or more in youth group during high school suggests that more than 65 percent of young adults who attend a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. (LifeWay, “LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church,” LifeWay

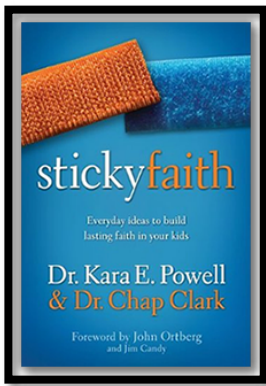
Christian Resources, <http://www.lifeway.com/article/165949>. In this study, respondents were not necessarily those who had graduated from youth group as seniors. In addition, the research design did not factor in parachurch or on-campus faith communities in their definition of college “church” attendance. Data from the National Study of Youth and Religion published in 2009 indicate an approximate 30 percent drop in frequent religious service attendance across multiple Protestant denominations. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Fuller Youth Institute’s estimate that 40 to 50 percent of high school graduates will fail to stick with their faith is based on a compilation of data from these various studies.

² The College Transition Project is a culmination of six years of study of 500 youth group students as they transition into college, including two three-year longitudinal studies and two interview studies. The goals of this research are to offer help to parents, leaders and churches in building a faith that lasts, or “sticky faith.” See our About on our website for more details: <http://stickyfaith.org/about-sticky-faith>.

³ This vision was inspired by the research of our friend and colleague Chap Clark.

⁴ Note that these weren’t just what students chose as most important to them but what seemed to have the strongest connection to the faith variables in our survey. Erika C. Knuth, *Intergenerational connections and faith development in late adolescence*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, Graduate School of Psychology, 2010).

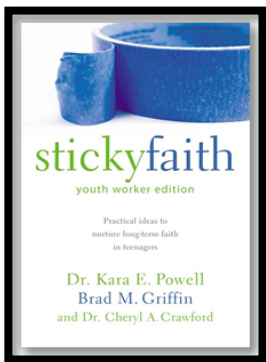
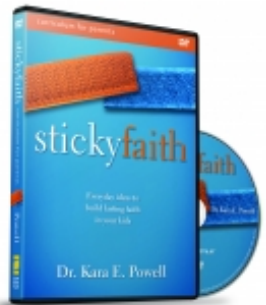
⁵ See David Frazee, “A Church in the Intergenerational HOV Lane,” FYI E-Journal, February 2, 2009, (<http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/2009/02/a-church-in-the-intergenerational-hov-lane>.)



Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids

Kara Powell and Chap Clark
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

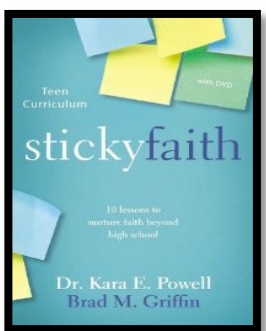
Nearly every Christian parent in America would give anything to find a viable resource for developing within their kids a deep, dynamic faith that “sticks” long term. Research shows that almost half of graduating high school seniors struggle deeply with their faith. Recognizing the ramifications of that statistic, the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) conducted the “College Transition Project” in an effort to identify the relationships and best practices that can set young people on a trajectory of lifelong faith and service. Based on FYI findings, this easy-to-read guide presents both a compelling rationale and a powerful strategy to show parents how to actively encourage their children’s spiritual growth so that it will stick to them into adulthood and empower them to develop a living, lasting faith. **Sticky Faith Parent Curriculum**, a video-based study, gives parents practical, tested ideas that launch kids of all ages into a lifelong journey of faith and service. Through personal, real-world experiences of research and sharing, the *Sticky Faith Parent Curriculum* enables parents to instill a deep and lasting faith in their adolescents.



Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids

Kara Powell, Brad M Griffin, Cheryl A. Crawford
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

As youth workers are pouring their time and energy into the students in their ministries, they are often left wondering if they’ve done enough to equip their students to carry their faith into adulthood. The Fuller Youth Institute has done extensive research in the area of youth ministry and teenage development. In *Sticky Faith*, the team at FYI presents youth workers with both a theological/philosophical framework and practical programming ideas that develop long-term faith in teenagers. Each chapter presents a summary of FYI’s quantitative and qualitative research, along with the implications of this research, including program ideas suggested and tested by youth ministries nationwide. **Sticky Faith Curriculum for Teenagers**, a 10-session book and DVD study, gives youth workers a theological and philosophical framework alongside real-world, road-tested programming ideas. The study is designed to help high school students develop a solid foundation that endures through the faith struggles they will face in college. It enables youth leaders to impact to their students with a faith that sticks.



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BY THE FULLER YOUTH INSTITUTE

YOUTH LEADERS PARENTS RESOURCES STORE BLOG

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Sticky Faith & Fuller Youth Institute Websites

(Click on image to go to the website.)



The Importance of Intergenerational Community for Faith Formation

John Roberto

Something old is new again. Congregations across the United States are rediscovering the power of the intergenerational faith community. Most congregations are multi-generational by membership. Some are *intentionally* intergenerational. They make their intergenerational character a defining feature of their community life, ministries, and programming. These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, and storytelling; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages, and to engage all generations in learning together. For these churches, being intergenerational is a way of life. It is an integral element of their culture. It is who they are!

Bringing generations together within the church provides benefits and blessings on a variety of levels. Insights from research and pastoral experience tell us that being intentionally intergenerational:

- reclaims God’s intent for faith to be shared in community and across generations
- affirms each person’s value in the total community (regardless of age)
- fosters a foundation of support of each other’s concerns, interests, and activities
- provides “up close and personal” formation in faith as children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults engage in sharing faith, teaching, learning, and praying for one another
- teaches us to care for one another
- provides role models for children and youth
- teaches us to value older adults
- allows us to pass on the traditions of family and faith

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- enhances people’s identification with their congregation and integration within the community
- encourages greater faith in all generations
- creates special relationships between adults and youth
- fosters leadership regardless of age or stature
- utilizes the strengths (the wisdom, experience, and knowledge) of one generation to meet the needs of another generation
- promotes understanding of shared values and respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life
- utilizes the creative talents of younger and older generations to provide service to the church and community

The “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry,” as reported in the book *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*, identified the significance of an intentionally intergenerational congregation on the faith maturity of young people. Congregation whose basic ministries were thoroughly intergenerational have a significant impact on the faith growth and commitment of young people. In these congregations young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making.

At Sunday worship in these congregations adults and youth greet each other and groups of adults gather for informal conversation with young people before and after the services. Young people bring their friends to worship because they are valued and the worship services engage them. Young people feel at home in these safe and nurturing communities where their participation, energy, concerns, questions, and faith life are valued. They turn to adults in the congregation for guidance and care. Young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. They

get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. The study presents a picture of welcoming congregations who respect and value young people and their youth ministries. These youth are surrounded by multiple, reinforcing spheres of relational Christian influence, and immersed in a larger, multi-generational community of quality relationships informed by faith in Jesus Christ.

What becomes clear in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” is that in addition to learning about God through excellent Bible teaching, young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. The study concludes that the power of faithful, multi-generational Christian relationships is at the heart of effective youth ministry.

Challenges for Intergenerational Relationships

There are many forces in our society and within our congregations that make the (re)establishment of intergenerational faith formation and relationship-building countercultural. We live in a society defined by age segregation, in which adults and children have minimal contact and activities. On a daily basis children and young people experience very few settings that are truly intergenerational; and this is also true for older adults in our society. The architecture and design of communities and neighborhoods tend to isolate individuals and families, and virtually every program and institution is organized to meet age-specific

needs at the expense of the richness of intergenerational community.

While intergenerational communities and extended families have long been the norm in human societies all over the world, U.S. society is pulling the generations apart. Among the many factors contributing to this are individualism, mobility, grandparents living at a distance from their children and grandchildren, age-segregated housing and activities for older adults, and the separation of children and youth by age levels and grades in education and activities.

Religious congregations are among the very few settings in our society where three or more generations gather for intentional activities, such as Sunday worship. Yet even in churches, children, youth, and adults are segregated by age from the rest of the community for many, if not most, of their activities. Educational programs are organized into learning groups or classes organized by age group or grade level. In a typical congregation today a child can be involved in Christian education programs from first grade through high school and never have the opportunity to meet and learn with other generations in the faith community—to the detriment of the individual and the other generations in the congregation. In some congregations children and youth are even separated for worship. In these congregations there are few, if any, settings for intergenerational learning and relationship-building. Is it any wonder that teenagers leave the church in their high school years? They have never had the opportunity to develop intergenerational relationships and develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the faith community. Teenagers don't leave the church; the church and teens were never introduced!

Age-specific and intergenerational faith formation are not either-or choices; they are complementary. Lifelong faith formation balances age-specific and intergenerational programs, activities, and strategies. Throughout the lifecycle there is a need for age groups (and interest-centered groups) to

gather because of age-related differences in development and age-related learning needs. Each congregation needs to determine the balance that is appropriate.

Approaches for Enhancing Intergenerational Relationships

There are dozens of ways that churches today are moving toward an intergenerational future, while still incorporating age-specific and interest-centered ministries and programming. In her article, "Breaking Down the Age Barriers," Amy Hanson (2008) reflects on the research she conducted on innovative churches across the U.S. She found that innovative churches are intentionally building multi-generational ministries into the fabric of their church culture. Some of the methods that she found to be effective included:

- Creating natural ways for the generations to serve together.
- Honoring older adults by asking them to tell their stories.
- Educating the church body on the value of intergenerational ministry.
- Finding ways to make the worship service multi-generational.
- Encouraging affinity groups, rather than age groups, as a way for people to connect.
- Hosting strategic intergenerational events.
- Matching young people with older adults in mentoring relationships. (Hanson, 3)

There many ways for churches to enhance intergenerational relationships that will promote lifelong faith formation. These practices are already being implemented in one form or another in Christian churches today and provide a starting part of a

congregation to develop its own customized plan.

Building Intergenerational Relationships throughout Church Life

Congregations can build intergenerational relationships by adjusting existing ministries and programs, and by creating new opportunities for intergenerational connections. Here are a few examples.

- Integrating intergenerational programming into age-group programming, such as quarterly intergenerational gatherings as part of the children's faith formation.
- Structuring age-group programs with an intergenerational connection, such as an educational program that includes interviews, panels, and storytelling with people of different generations.
- 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 children/youth and adults, 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 mid life 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, e.g., when young 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.
- Developing specific roles for the younger generations in church leadership, such as adolescents serving as teachers in children's faith formation or as worship leaders.
- Organizing a leadership or ministry apprenticeship for younger generations to serve in church ministries and leadership positions.
- Sponsoring music and art projects such as a community concert where musicians of all ages perform together, or an intergenerational art exchange or exhibit, or an Advent or Lent music festival.
- 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).

Developing Intergenerational Learning

Congregations are becoming intentionally intergenerational by incorporating intergenerational learning into their lifelong faith formation plan. Intergenerational learning provides a way to educate the whole community, bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other. Intergenerational learning integrates learning, building community, sharing faith, praying,

celebrating, and practicing faith. The key point is that everyone is learning together— young and old, single and married, families with children and empty-nest families. And it involves the whole family in a shared learning experience.

Churches tend to implement intergenerational learning in one of two approaches: 1) as their core faith formation program for all ages, supplemented by age-specific and affinity group faith formation models, or 2) as one element in their lifelong approach with age-specific and affinity group learning.

In the first approach churches make the intergenerational learning program their core faith formation program for all ages usually conducting monthly intergenerational programs as their core experience, and then offering a variety of age-group or affinity-group programs throughout the month. They have replaced or modified their age group programming, such as Sunday School, to place an emphasis on all ages learning together. They develop a multi-year curriculum for the whole community that can include themes from the Bible, the cycle of Sunday lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, Christian practices, service and social justice, prayer and spiritual disciplines, core Christian beliefs, and moral teachings.

In the second approach intergenerational learning can take a variety of forms, such as an all-ages workshop, a whole-congregation Bible study, all ages conversations after Sunday worship focused on the scripture readings and sermon. Churches have also added an intergenerational learning component to a vacation Bible school or summer program. They take the theme from the summer program and offer an intergenerational program on that same theme for the whole community, engaging the parents and grandparents in learning around the same content as the children have experienced. Churches also use intergenerational learning to prepare the community for a new liturgical year and the

lectionary readings, for particular church year feasts and seasons (Advent-Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost), and for church-wide events, such as Stewardship Sunday.

One model of intergenerational learning being used by hundreds of churches across the United States begins with an All Ages Learning Experience (intergenerational); moves to an In-Depth Learning Experience (age-specific or intergenerational) taught in one of three formats: age group, whole group or learning activity centers; and concludes by Sharing Learning Reflections and Preparing for Practice (intergenerational).

1. Gathering and Opening Prayer
2. All-Ages Learning Experience. Intergenerational learning begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together.
3. In-Depth Learning Experience. Through structured learning activities each generation—families with children, adolescents, and adults—explores the biblical and theological understanding of the topic, using one of three possible formats:
 - The *Age Group Format* provides parallel, age-appropriate learning for groups at the same time. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic—utilizing specific learning activities that are designed for their life cycle stage: families with children or children alone, adolescents, young adults, and adults.
 - The *Whole Group Format* provides a series of facilitated learning activities for everyone at the same time using intergenerational or age-specific small groups or table groups.
 - The *Learning Activity Center Format* provides structured

intergenerational and age-specific learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area.

4. Sharing Learning Reflections and Application. In intergenerational groups participants share what they learned and prepare for applying their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or online.
5. Closing Prayer Service

For more on intergenerational learning see *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* by John Roberto (Twenty-Third Publications, 2006), and *Intergenerational Faith Formation* by Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber (Twenty-Third Publications, 2008). For articles on intergenerational learning go to www.LifelongFaith.com, “Intergenerational Faith Formation.”

Utilizing Milestones throughout Life

Milestones are significant moments in life’s journey that provide the opportunity for people of all ages 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. Faith formation around milestones, sacramental celebrations, and life transitions provides another way that congregations can be intentionally intergenerational—engaging the whole community in the celebration of the milestone, promoting the spiritual and faith growth of all ages, enhancing family faith practice at home, and strengthening people’s engagement in the church community.

Congregational milestones include: baptism, welcoming young children to worship, first communion, presentation of Bibles, confirmation, marriage, a funeral, sending people on mission trips, and much more. *Lifecycle milestones* include: entering a new stage of schooling, graduations (middle

school, high school, college, or graduate school), getting a driver’s license, leaving home for college or the military, first home or apartment, new career or job, moving, retirement, death of a family member, and much more. *Annual milestones* include birthdays, anniversaries, start of the school year (e.g. blessing backpacks), seasons of the church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week), and much more.

Each milestone incorporates intergenerational components at home and church: 1) a ritual celebration or a blessing marking the milestone with the whole church community; 2) a home ritual celebration or blessing marking the milestone; 3) a learning program, for the individual and the family, that prepares them for the milestone and its significance for their life and faith; 4) a tangible, visible reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, given by the church community; and 5) people and resources to support continuing faith growth and practice after the milestone.

For resources on milestones faith formation see *Milestones Ministry Manual for Home and Congregation* (Vibrant Faith Ministries, 2007), *Faith Stepping Stones* (Faith Inkubators, www.faithink.org), *Milestones of Faith* by Laura Keeley and Robert J. Keeley (Faith Alive 2009), and *Shift* by Brian Haynes (Group, 2009).

Creating Intergenerational Service

Intergenerational service provides many benefits to individuals, families, and the whole church community. Intergenerational service helps narrow the generation gap between older and younger church members; recognizes that all people in the church, regardless of age, have talents to contribute that are valuable and important; assists children and youth in feeling a part of the church today, not just the church of tomorrow; connects the generations and builds relationships as they serve God by serving their neighbor; communicates that it

is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of age, to serve people and work for justice as a follower Jesus Christ.

Churches can incorporate inter-generational service into existing service projects and activities *and* create intergenerational versions of an existing program. Almost any service project can become intergenerational. For example:

- Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
- Connecting youth with adults in the church who already preparing and serving meals at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Engaging children, parents, and older adults in collecting and delivering food baskets, school kits for children, “personal essentials” for those at a homeless shelter, toys at Christmas, gift packages for prisoners, and so on.
- Involving families in caring for the elderly by visiting them at a convalescent home or senior citizen facility or doing chores and shopping.
- Supporting efforts to provide vaccines and medical care to the world’s poor, such as mosquito nets for malaria prevention and immunizations against childhood disease.
- Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to a) support the efforts of local and national groups who work directly with the poor, b) adopt a community in another country by supporting them financially and learning about their culture and community life, or c) support organizations that are building schools and libraries for children in the poorest countries of the world by providing books and/or our money to purchase books for children.
- 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 by 1) becoming familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people’s basic needs, 2) writing advocacy letters or emails, 3) working with advocacy groups, and/or 4) working with organizations that are changing the structures that promote injustice.

- Holding a fair trade festival to provide a way for people to buy fair trade products, such as coffee, chocolate, and crafts, that benefit local producers in the developing world.
- Sponsoring a community-wide “care for the environment day” by planting trees and cleaning-up the community

Churches can mobilize the whole faith community through an annual church-wide justice and service project. An example of this type of church-wide involvement is *Faith in Action Day* sponsored by World Vision and Outreach, Inc. It is a four-week, church-wide campaign that culminates in a Sunday where the entire congregation engages in service projects in and with the community (see www.putyourfaithinaction.org). Churches can select a local and/or global project already developed by a justice or service organization. Then develop an annual theme, such as poverty, care for creation, peacemaking. Prepare the whole community for the service engagement, utilizing the resources developed by the partner organizations: 1) worship and prayer experiences focused on the particular theme or project; 2) educational sessions including social analysis of the issues and reflection on the teachings of Scripture and the Christian tradition; 3) household activities on the theme or project: prayers, learning resources, action suggestions; 4) a website with the resources, activities, action projects, and features to allow people to share what they are doing; and 5) special presentations by experts on the issues and by people engaged in action on the issue.

Being Intergenerational Makes a Difference

In my work and research on intergenerational faith formation I have discovered the power that it has to renew and enliven a faith community. For six years I developed and coordinated the Generations of Faith Project, a service of the Center for Ministry Development and a Lilly Endowment funded project. At the conclusion of the project we conducted a qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (survey) research study to determine what effects intergenerational faith formation was having on the participants, the church leaders, and the whole community. Over 400 Catholic parishes responded, out of the close to 1,000 parishes who participated in the Generations of Faith Project. We found many hopeful signs in the churches that were making intentional intergenerational learning a centerpiece of their lifelong faith formation efforts. (The results of the study are available on my website, www.LifelongFaith.com under “Intergenerational Faith Formation.”)

We discovered that the practice of intergenerational learning strengthens and creates new relationships and increases participation in church life. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational relationships were created as people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together.
- Intergenerational learning strengthened the faith community through relationship building and participation in church life; people took time to talk and share with each other.
- Participation in intergenerational learning led to greater involvement in church life, including Sunday liturgy, church events, and church ministries.

We discovered that intergenerational learning did, in fact, bring together people of

all ages, including families, for learning. In particular many churches found that parents and adults began participating in faith formation because of intergenerational learning. Specifically the study found:

- There was involvement of all ages and generations in learning together: parents and children, teens, young adults, adults, older adults, and whole families.
- Intergenerational learning addressed a hunger that adults have to learn more about their faith and fill in the gaps in their formation. More middle-age and older adults were participating in faith formation.
- Families enjoyed opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families were growing in the ways that they share faith. Parents were participating in a learning program with their children, often for the first time, and finding benefits in learning together as a family.

We discovered that intergenerational learning created a learning environment—one of warmth, trust, acceptance, and care—conducive to all ages, and promoted group participation, activities, and discussion. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational learning created an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.
- Intergenerational learning engaged the participants in a variety of learning activities that were experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive. It fostered all-ages learning, as well addressing the developmental needs and abilities of the different age groups. Faith sharing and personal experience were an important element of intergenerational learning.

- Intergenerational learning was exciting; the enthusiasm, joy, and energy were attractive and contagious.

We discovered that the practice of intergenerational learning required a diversity of leadership who practiced a *collaborative* and *empowering* style of leadership. This style of leadership needed to be exercised not just by the pastor or faith formation coordinator, but by the entire leadership team. Intergeneration learning required committed volunteer leaders who were engaged in a variety of roles in lifelong faith formation: planning, teaching, organizing, and supporting. Teamwork and collaboration were essential for the effective planning and implementation of intergenerational learning.

It is clear to me that living as an *intentionally* intergenerational Christian community brings great blessings and benefits to everyone. Being intergenerational makes a difference!

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Christian Education Journal Spring 2012 (Volume 9, Issue 1) Theme: Intergenerational Ministry



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Sacred Matters—Religion & Spirituality in Families: Main Ideas in Sacred Theory

Wesley R. Burr, Loren D. Marks, and Randal D. Day

Family researchers and theorists Burr, Marks, and Day have created a conceptual framework and general theory (or model) about when, how, and why sacred matters are helpful (and harmful) in families. They have developed their “Sacred Theory” model using their own qualitative and quantitative research on families, as well as building on numerous other studies. This summary is drawn from Chapter 1, “Overview and Main Ideas in Sacred Theory” in their book, Sacred Matters: Religion and Spirituality in Families (New York: Routledge, 2012).

It is difficult to create precise definitions of the primary terms in general theories, but it seems important to summarize our working definition of *sacred*. It refers to the parts of the human experience that are sufficiently awe inspiring that they transform the thinking and feeling of individuals from the ordinary, mundane, and routine into what is perceived as holy, hallowed, and sacrosanct. This transformation leads to high levels of reverence, adoration, deference, and respect. These experiences include but are not limited to divine, heavenly, otherworldly, transcendental, numenal, and spiritual experiences and beliefs; and they frequently but not always provide the basis for religious experiences and religiously motivated behaviors.

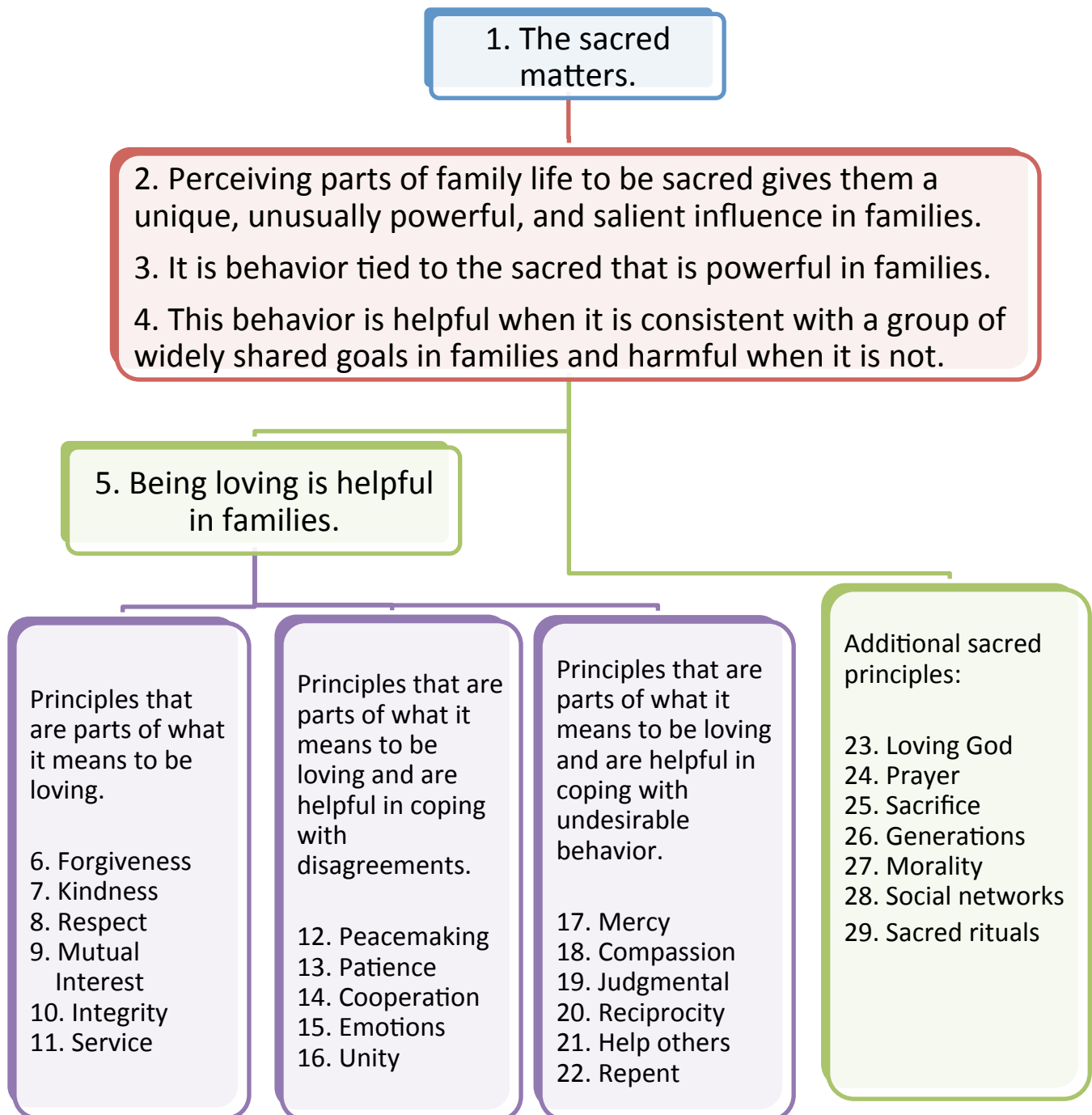
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A Framework for Understanding Sacred Theory in Families

The following diagram reflects a new conceptual framework and a general theory in family studies that uses ideas *from* and *about* the sacred. The theory has four general propositions about the role of sacred matters. These propositions assert that sacred matters are unusually salient and powerful in the human condition generally and in family life in particular; and they describe what it is about the sacred that makes a difference in families, as well as when behaviors that results from sacred beliefs and ideals are helpful and harmful.



Proposition 1. *The sacred matters: experiencing parts of the human experience to be sacred gives them a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence in families.*

A simple way of summarizing this proposition is that *the sacred matters, and it matters a lot*—irrespective of cultural differences, historical conditions, religious persuasion, and even participation. The idea that experiences with sacredness create salience and power is a truth assertion or proposition that became an assumption on which the rest of sacred theory is built. It is the most valuable and defensible intellectual bedrock we have seen for a theory about sacred matters in families.

There are a number of characteristics of the sacred that help explain why Proposition 1 is true and helpful. The sacred inherently inspires awe and reverence. It deals with the parts of life that lead to worship, commitment, devotion, dedication, and veneration. It deals with the extraordinary and hallowed rather than the ordinary. It inspires, amazes, and leads to wonder. It deals with the supernatural and numinous. It provides ideas and beliefs about the BIG questions in life that deal with the nature, meaning, and purposes of reality and human existence. Therefore by its very nature, the sacred occupies a unique, salient, and powerful place in human experience.

Proposition 2. *Experiencing parts of family life as sacred gives them a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence in families.*

This proposition provides valuable understanding and explanation about *why* the research has consistently found significant correlations between religious beliefs/activities and valued family outcomes. Proposition 2 also provides insight,

explanation, and understanding about why scholars and practitioners who want to understand and explain what makes families effect and who want to develop programs to help families ought to give this idea a central role in their theories, research, and intervention programs.

Proposition 3. *It is variation in what people do as a result of their ideals and beliefs about the sacred that determines whether the sacred is helpful or harmful in families, and it is not the mere presence of religion in general or global religiosity that makes the difference.*

In other words, it is how family members act as a result of their sacred beliefs that matters. It is how family members use aspects of the sacred that is crucial because people can be religious generally and behave in some ways that are not helpful, and they can be low in religiosity and behave in ways that are helpful.

Proposition 4. *The more behavior is consistent with a cluster of widely shared goals in families the more it tends to be helpful, and the more it is inconsistent with these goals the more it tends to be harmful.*

Our observations and interviews suggest that there are at least five areas where there are widely shared and important goals in families. How families strive to reach these goals plays out in infinitely variable ways in different cultures and subcultures, historical conditions, and technologies; and there is great variation in how effectively they are carried out. Our list is not exhaustive, but it is relevant for most people, and the ideas in it are sufficiently general that they are relevant for a wide range of cultural, religious, and historical conditions. We don't view these

goals as an ultimate or comprehensive list that ought to be etched in stone. They are working tools that help provide a manageable model that we have found helpful in our theory building.

Family Goals

1. Providing Helping Patterns

The irreducible core of family life is the cluster of experiences, connections, and emotions that derive from the birth process, and they create a need for complex patterns of *helping*. Infants and young children need vast amounts of help for many years if they are to survive, learn, grow, and thrive; and helping patterns continue to be important through the entire human life cycle if people are to successfully learn to understand, face, and manage the opportunities, challenges, and transitions that are encountered in the human life course. These helping patterns include the socialization of young and old, and they also include much more.

Families experience successes with regard to these helping patterns when they effectively help family members prepare intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially to make the routine transitions in the life course that are expected in their community. This includes producing children who can be launched from their family of orientation and effectively assume adult responsibilities as they approach adulthood. It also includes preparing family members to let go of their children when they are ready to be launched, and for the changes that come with aging. Helping patterns also include helping family members acquire the ability to be creative, resourceful, humane, and resilient when they encounter unexpected and undesirable experiences. Failures result when families provide so little help that members are not able to effectively make these transitions and adjustments. These successes and failures can also be partial and involve many levels or degrees of effectiveness.

2. Meeting Emotional Needs

Another area where there are widely shared goals for families, and where families encounter successes and failures, is in helping meet a group of the deep and meaningful emotional needs. Humans have deeply felt strivings for connection with others in intimate and caring relationships that involve support, love, and commitment. Public, occupational, and civic settings, and other secondary relationships tend to be transitory, variable, and optional, meaning that people tend to move in and out of these relationships, thus limiting individuals' ability to satisfy and meet their deeper human emotional needs in those settings. Therefore the deeper emotional needs of humans are only (at best) partially met in the transient, secondary, bureaucratic, public, less personal, and often market-oriented conditions that exist outside families and homes.

Many of the more important and deeply experienced emotions are best met in families that provide intimate, nurturing, stable, bonded, and humane relationships that involve "whole" persons across the entire life course. Family life is, for many, the part of the human experience that provides an optimal place for meeting many of these emotional needs.

Families vary a great deal in how well they meet emotional needs. Some families are so chaotic and dysfunctional that the people in them never learn how to create and maintain intimacy and closeness in supportive, tender, caring, enduring, bonded, and loving relationships. People who grow up in such families are often limited in their ability to experience affection, bonds, encouragement, predictability, celebration, and a sense of belonging and meaning. Success occurs when families are able to meet these emotional needs; failure occurs when these emotional needs are not met.

There are some human emotional needs that are met more effectively in the public realms than in familial parts of life. For

example, family life is not very effective in meeting needs for novelty, excitement, adventure, unpredictability, and adrenaline-producing adventures. These needs or desires are usually met more effectively in nonfamily settings. The emotional needs that family life is especially suited for meeting are those for such things as connection, love, caring, nurturing, support, intimacy, stability, learning, coping, healing, and continuity.

3. Providing a Home

A third area where there are widely shared goals in families is in creating, providing, and maintaining a home—in both a literal and ideal sense. The ideal condition in nearly all societies has been for the family to create and maintain homes. A home is where people can be “off-stage.” It is the place “where they have to take you in.” Other living arrangements such as dormitories, ships at sea, orphanages, rest homes, military housing, and foster homes are all temporary arrangements that are helpful when people do not have access to a family living in a home, but these are typically temporary or transitory substitutes that are less than ideal.

Families encounter successes with regard to this part of life when they consistently give and receive love and care, and manage what Maslow refers to as physiological needs—as well as coping with other needs relating to illnesses, accidents, exceptionalities, and bridging and bonding with other parts of life such as economic roles and resources, schools, medicine, law, entertainment, and the like. Thus success occurs when a family-in-a-home provides a sense of affectionate belonging and connection that helps people avoid feeling that they are alone, isolated, and lonely. Home is a success when it is a healthy base of operation—the center of people’s lives and the place from which they move out to their more temporary, voluntary, and role-specific activities in work, sports, church, friendships, neighborhoods, and so forth. Metaphorically, the ideal family/home is the

hub of the wheel of life, and spokes go out to other parts. Failures occur when people do not have a family-in-a-home that can accomplish these many parts of the ideal human condition, when they are not managed well, or when important parts of them are poorly accomplished.

4. Balancing Stability and Change

A fourth area where there are widely shared family goals is in maintaining an effective balance between stability and change. Humans need enough stability to have predictability, safety, and a sense of order; but we also need the capacity to adjust to inevitable change, including ever-changing developmental shifts and an array of less predictable demands. A measure of stability, perhaps even considerable stability, is essential for the longterm, intimate, close, warm, nurturing, private, personal, and cherished parts of life that exist in families.

Families tend to be successful when the core relationships in them are permanent and predictable—and when they also have enough flexibility and adaptability that they can change when it is wise or needed. Failures are likely when there is chaos and unpredictability, and when people find it necessary to terminate marital and family relationships. This aspect of family life can be operationalized with rates of divorce, disowning, running-away, desertion, and so on.

5. Avoiding and Coping With “Undesirables”

Another area where there are widely shared goals for families has to do with undesirable experiences. There are a number of conditions in human life that are undesirable, and people try to avoid them. Some examples are accidents, illnesses, tragedies, loneliness, nihilism, and emptiness—rather than meaning, connection, intimacy, and purpose. The undesirables also include academic

failures, addictions, gang involvement, violence, incest, delinquency, criminal behavior, unwanted pregnancies, rejection, and many forms of abuse such as sexual, physical, drug, and emotional abuse.

Successes tend to occur when families find ways to avoid these undesirables, and when families are resilient and effective in coping with undesirables when they cannot be avoided. Failures occur when families are not helpful in avoiding undesirable conditions, when they contribute to undesirables, and when they are not helpful in being resilient and effective in coping with them when they cannot be avoided.

Research shows that neighbors, coworkers, and friends can be (and often are) helpful to a degree in coping with these challenges, but the limits of these more transitory, voluntary, and superficial relationships typically tend to be reached quickly. There are important limits to how much people can turn to secondary relationships such as roommates, friends, and coworkers when they encounter serious challenges; and effective family life is well suited to providing the more involved and long-term caring, nurturing, support, and helpfulness that are needed when serious challenges are faced.

Conclusion: The Sacred Matters in Family Life

The major religious traditions provide ideas and answers that have a fundamental compatibility and helpfulness with the basic and enduring goals in family life, and it is likely that this compatibility has increased over the millennia. It also is likely that this compatibility will continue to increase in the future.

The result of this symbiotic relationship between the sacred and familial is that people who are comfortable with the major religious traditions also tend to be more successful, as a group, than those who, for whatever reasons,

tend to be less comfortable with the existing traditions about the sacred. A result is that when social scientists began gathering survey data in the 1930s about religiosity and family success, they found positive correlations.

This pattern is a form of a cultural survival of the fittest. The ideas that are not compatible with the goals in families tend to be rejected and fade, whereas the beliefs and approaches that are consistent with the goals in families are retained and emphasized. And over successive generations the more successful ways persist and flourish. In this winnowing process, sacred ideas help individuals and families find meaning, create order, and relate in ways that result in effective and successful homes and families. This relationship between the sacred and familial is extremely complex and multifaceted, and involves many different aspects of the sacred and the familial. It evolves and changes over time and in different social, economic, climatic, and governmental circumstances, but these are some of the reasons aspects of the sacred are helpful in families.

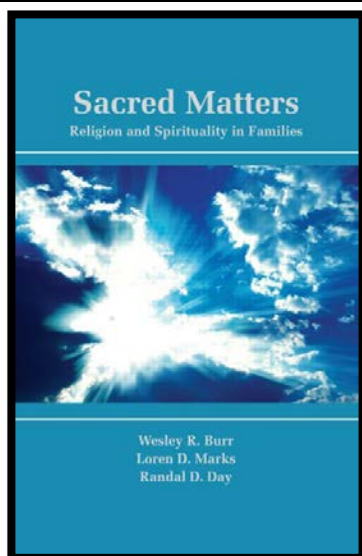
Thus we suggest that the most profound way the sacred can help families is that it can provide a set of ideas about the “big picture” in the human experience, and the ideas in the major world religions can provide clusters of time-tested ideas and answers about the most fundamental whys of life. These ideas in turn provide ideas that give meaning and purpose to existence. They provide ideas about the higher and most noble aspects of what it means to be human. They provide ideas that help create order, integration, and harmony in life generally and in family life in particular.

We are therefore suggesting that the sacred parts of the human experience provide individuals and families with a complex array of deeply meaningful ideologies, perspectives, values, ideals, prescriptions, hopes, strategies, limitations, constraints, proscriptions, and emotional experiences. These parts of the human experience are deeply ingrained into

human minds, and, more importantly, into their hearts, and the insights provided by and about the sacred thereby help meet some of the most fundamental and basic needs of families.

These theoretical ideas seem helpful, but they are only a beginning in trying to better understand why the positive relationship between religiosity and valued family outcomes has so consistently recurred. It is likely that as future scholarly inquiry

examines and tests these ideas, they will need to be refined and modified further because our first attempt to articulate them is undoubtedly limited and inadequate in many ways. There are still many questions about the why and the how that remain unanswered, so this is an area where there is a need for additional theorizing and research; but these ideas provide the beginnings of an explanation of the reasons sacred phenomena tend to help families.



Sacred Matters: Religion and Spirituality in Families

Wesley R. Burr, Loren D. Marks, and Randal D. Day
(New York: Routledge, 2012).

Sacred Matters explores the multi-disciplinary literature about the role of religion in family life and provides new research and a new theory about ways various aspects of the sacred are helpful and harmful. *Sacred Matters* features a new conceptual framework and theory about how, when, and why sacred matters influence family processes and outcomes. It begins with a review of the previous literature and then expands the research about sanctification to create a new general theory (or model) about ways sacred processes help and hinder families. Next the authors expand the theory and research about the role of forgiveness, sacrifice, and prayer in families. New theory and research are then added about loving, coping with conflict, dealing with undesirable behavior, generational relationships, morality, and the psychosocial aspects of religion.

Chapters

1. Overview and Main Ideas in Sacred Theory
2. Forgiving
3. Asking and Seeking
4. Sacrificing
5. Loving Others
6. Aspects of Loving
7. Coping with Disagreements
8. Coping with Undesirable Behavior
9. Loving God
10. Generations
11. Morality
12. Psychosocial Aspects
13. Relationships with Other Perspectives

For more information go to [Routledge Publishers](#).



An Overview of “The American Family Assets Study”

Search Institute

A groundbreaking national study by Search Institute shows how critical outcomes like academic performance, civic engagement and healthy lifestyles are directly linked to family strengths. The American Family Assets Study creates a new portrait of America’s families that focuses on family relationships, rather than family structure. It introduces a new, research-based framework of Family Assets made up of relationships, interactions, opportunities, and values that help families thrive. It is based on a survey conducted online by Harris Interactive in June 2011 of a broad, diverse cross-section of more than 1,500 families.

The American Family Assets Study presents a compelling national portrait of America’s families which focuses on their strengths, hopes, and aspirations and aims to help families become catalysts for change in the health and well-being of all children, families, and communities. This study includes the most comprehensive national survey of family assets ever conducted in the United States. The family-focused developmental assets measured in this study focus on the family relationships, interactions, opportunities, values, skills, and self-perceptions that position family members to thrive; not economic or tangible assets like jobs, houses, cars, bank accounts, or other materials possessions.

To date, most research has taken a narrow view of both families and well-being. The American Family Assets Study was intentionally designed to give voice to the diversity of adults, youth, and experiences that make up the modern American family and to empirically demonstrate the ways adults and youth pull together to support and bring out the best in one another.

For more than 50 years, **Search Institute**® has been a global leader in discovering what kids need to succeed. Through surveys of more than 3.5 million children and youth, 150+ books and other resources, and collaboration with schools and youth-serving organizations, Search Institute helps solve critical challenges in the lives of young people. The organization’s 40 Developmental Assets® are the most widely recognized approach to positive youth development in North America. (www.search-institute.org)

Towards this end, this study:

- defines and assesses multiple assets within a family
- distinguishes good parenting from family assets by recognizing young people as active agents in the development of family well-being
- acknowledges that young people are parented not just by biological mothers and fathers but also by grandparents; adoptive, foster, and step parents; legal guardians; and, other family members
- includes the perspectives of both young people and parenting adults in the assessment of family assets
- empirically links family assets to measurable outcomes for young people, parenting adults, and families

The study shows that families that have more Family Assets, also experience more positive outcomes for both the children and the parents in the family. Youth from families with higher levels of Family Assets tend to be more engaged in school, take better care of their own health, and show a greater willingness to act when they see others being treated unfairly. Similarly, parents from families with higher levels of Family Assets are more likely to care for their own health and to be active in their communities.

American families score an average of 47 out of 100 on an index of Family Assets, demographic differences matter little in a family's score. On average, the overall level of Family Assets does not differ much by parent education, single- vs. two-parent families, immigration status, parents' sexual orientation, or household income (though, regardless of income, assets do seem to differ by level of financial stress family members feel).

At the same time, there are slight differences by race/ethnicity and different types of communities. Black and Hispanic families have more assets than Whites, Asians

and families of other races or ethnicities. And families living in urban communities have more assets than those in suburban or rural communities. In general, though, the study highlights that there are more similarities than differences across demographic groups.

"In the midst of a great deal of debate about the state and structure of families, this study focuses on factors within families that really make a difference," said Eugene C. Roehlkepartain of Search Institute. "Our research clearly shows that all kinds of families can be stronger by paying attention to how they build strong relationships, set routines and expectations, deal with challenges in healthy ways, and develop deep connections to their communities. Supporting families in building these strengths will go a long way in addressing major challenges we face as a nation."

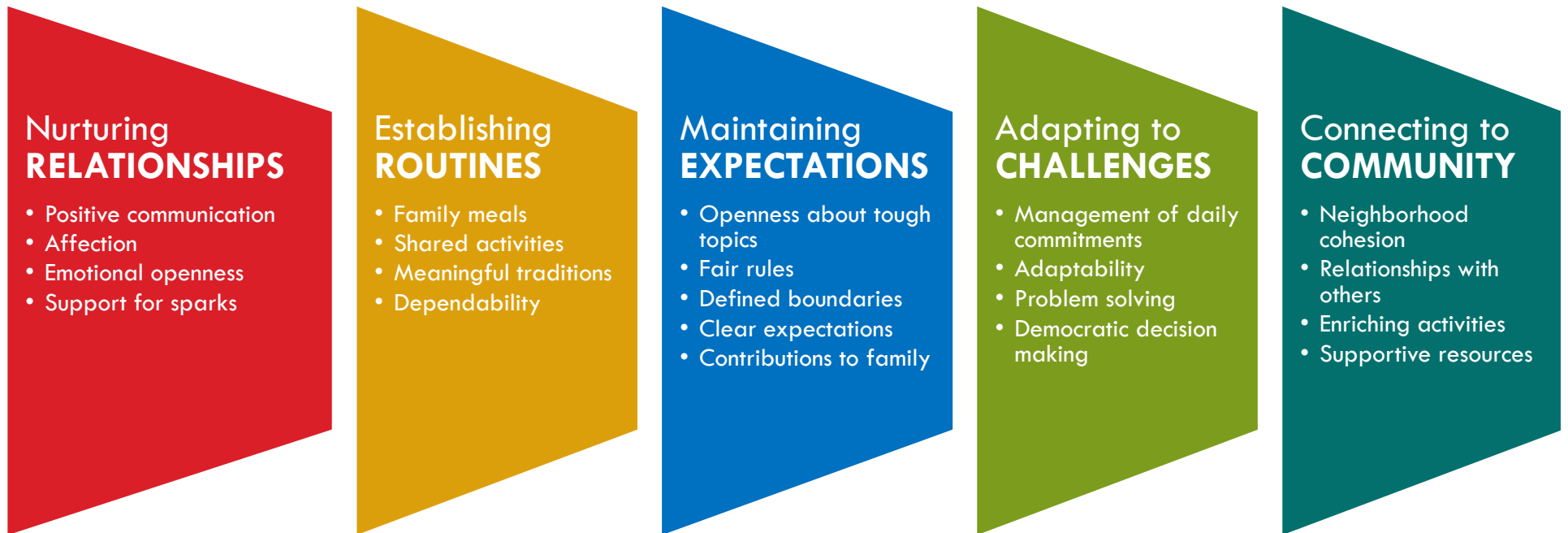
This landmark study blends the perspectives of youth ages 10 to 15 and their parenting adults to show how a wide range of diverse families experience both strengths and gaps in Family Assets. American families show the most strength in the category of "nurturing relationships" and the greatest needs in the categories of "establishing routines," "adapting to challenges," and "connecting to community." The most common Family Asset is "clear expectations" (84%); the least common Family Asset is "relationships with others" in the community (22%).

Family Assets Research

Download a copy of the Family Assets Study and a Discussion Guide from Search Institute's web site: www.search-institute.org.

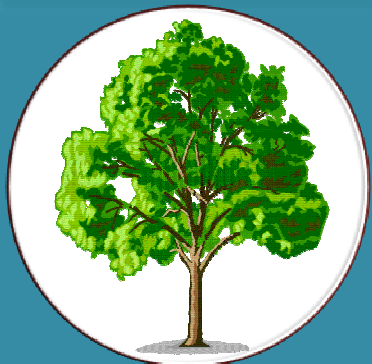
[The Family Assets Study](#)

The Family Assets Index was developed to capture the diversity of ways family members support one another through their day-to-day interactions.



The Index was informed by scientific research in the areas of family systems theory, resiliency, and adolescent development; and, listening sessions hosted with youth, adults, family professionals, and leaders in the family research and policy arenas.

The Index averages reports from one parenting adult and one 10- to 15-year old child from the same family on five categories of family assets. Within these 5 categories, there are 21 assets. The Index ranges from 0 to 100.



What They Are:

STRONG families :

- Keep youth safe
- Help each other learn and pursue their deep interests
- Create opportunities to connect with others
- Teach youth to make good decisions
- Foster positive identity and values
- Nurture spiritual development
- Build social-emotional skills
- Encourage healthy life habits

How They Do It:

NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

MAINTAINING EXPECTATIONS

ADAPTING TO CHALLENGES

CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY

How They Do It:



Why They Do It:

To foster the development of:

YOUTH who are...

- Thriving
- Caring
- Healthy
- Purposeful
- Contributing to Family/Community
- Responsible

PARENTING ADULTS who are...

- Satisfied with their Relationships
- Competent

WHOLE FAMILY who are...

- Happy
- Able to Handle Conflict Effectively
- Civically Engaged

Search Institute® has identified the following key qualities that help all kinds of families be strong. When families have more of these research-based assets, the teens and adults in the family do better in life.

Nurturing Relationships

- **Positive communication**—Family members listen attentively and speak in respectful ways.
- **Affection**—Family members regularly show warmth to each other.
- **Emotional openness**—Family members can be themselves and are comfortable sharing their feelings.
- **Support for sparks**—Family members encourage each other in pursuing their talents and interests.

Establishing Routines

- **Family meals**—Family members eat meals together most days in a typical week.
- **Shared activities**—Family members regularly spend time doing everyday activities together.
- **Meaningful traditions**—Holidays, rituals, and celebrations are part of family life.
- **Dependability**—Family members know what to expect from one another day-to-day.

Maintaining Expectations

- **Openness about tough topics**—Family members openly discuss sensitive issues, such as sex and substance use.
- **Fair rules**—Family rules and consequences are reasonable.
- **Defined boundaries**—The family sets limits on what young people can do and how they spend their time.
- **Clear expectations**—The family openly articulates its expectations for young people.
- **Contributions to family**—Family members help meet each other's needs and share in getting things done.

Adapting to Challenges

- **Management of daily commitments**—Family members effectively navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work.
- **Adaptability**—The family adapts well when faced with changes.
- **Problem solving**—Family members work together to solve problems and deal with challenges.
- **Democratic decision making**—Family members have a say in decisions that affect the family.

Connecting to Community

- **Neighborhood cohesion**—Neighbors look out for one another.
- **Relationships with others**—Family members feel close to teachers, coaches, and others in the community.
- **Enriching activities**—Family members participate in programs and activities that deepen their lives.
- **Supportive resources**—Family members have people and places in the community they can turn to for help.

For information on the research behind the family assets, visit www.search-institute.org/familyassets

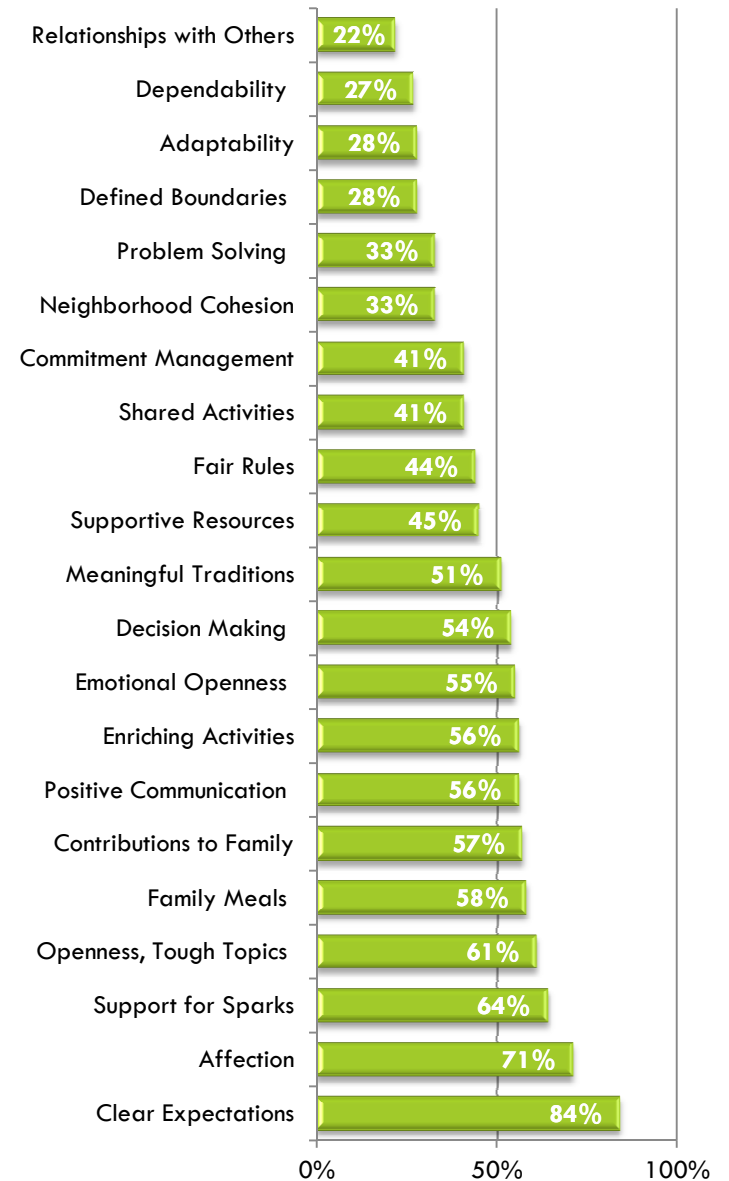
For practical ways to build assets in your family, visit www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets

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The least common asset: close relationships with others in the community.

The most common asset: clarity of parents' expectations for youth around issues like school performance and keeping adults informed about who they are with and what they are doing.

Figure 4. Percent of families meeting the aspirational criterion for each family asset.



Note. Three family assets were assessed only by youth: Shared Activities, Fair Rules, and Family Meals.

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Family Assets
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 Family Assets Framework Ideas for Building Family Assets
 Thriving
 Sparks
 An Engaged Community
 Spiritual Development

An Overview

THE AMERICAN Family Assets STUDY

The American Family Assets Study presents a compelling national portrait of families. It introduces a new framework of **Family Assets**—relationships, interactions, opportunities, and values that help families thrive. These assets are associated with positive outcomes for young teens and their parenting adults, explaining more of the differences in outcomes than many demographics and other individual and family characteristics explain.

The study blends the perspectives of both teens and their parenting adults to show how a wide range of diverse families experience both strengths and gaps in Family Assets. The framework proposes an ideal—something families might aspire to as a vision for how they live their lives together. In our national study, American families scored an average of 47 out of 100 in the **Family Assets Index**, suggesting that the vast majority of families have both strengths to celebrate and opportunities to grow stronger together.

[Download a PDF of the study overview](#)

Family Assets Webinar

The Ordinary Magic of Modern Families: New, National Research on Family Strengths

Did you know? 94% of youth believe they can count on their family to support them when they have a problem or challenge.

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The Importance of Family Faith for Lifelong Faith Formation

John Roberto

One of the most significant, and to many startling, findings in the National Study on Youth and Religion (NSYR) is the impact of parental faith and religiosity on the beliefs and practices of teenagers. NSYR found: “of parents who report that their faith is *extremely* important in their daily lives, 67% of their teens report that faith is extremely or very important in their daily lives; only 8% of those parents’ teens report that faith is not very or not important in their lives.” (Smith and Denton, 57)

The opposite is also true: parents for whom faith is somewhat or not at all important have teens who believe the same thing. Smith concludes, “In sum, therefore, we think that the best general rule of thumb is this” ‘We’ll get what we are.’ By normal processes of socialization, and unless other significant forces intervene, more than what parents might *say they want* as religious outcomes of their children, most parents most likely will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves *are*.” (Smith and Denton, 57)

The importance of parental faith and practice on the lives of children and teens is clear.

Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misconceptions, we believe that *the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents* (emphasis added). Grandparents and other relatives, mentors, and youth workers can be very influential as well, but normally, parents are most important in forming their children’s religious and spiritual lives. . .the best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual

John Roberto is the editor of the *Lifelong Faith* journal, author of *Faith Formation 2020*, and co-author of *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*.

(This article is developed from the research presented in Chapter 5 of *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* by Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto. St Paul: EYM Publications, 2010.)

lives of their parents *do* look like. Parents and other adults most likely “will get what they are.” This recognition may be empowering to parents, or alarming, or both. But it is a fact worth taking seriously in any case. (Smith and Denton, 261)

Smith and Denton conclude: “The best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities.” (Smith and Denton, 267)

In a second NSYR study, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, Christian Smith and Patricia Snell exam the factors in adolescence that influence religious commitments and practices during emerging adulthood (18-23 year olds). Once again the impact of parents early in life and in adolescence continues into emerging adulthood.

Among the variables in the first NSYR survey of teenagers, having had highly religious parents, a high importance of faith, frequent personal prayer, a larger number of personal religious experiences, frequent scripture reading, and frequent religious service attendance during the teenage years are the *most strongly* associated with more religious service attendance, greater importance of faith, and more frequent prayer during emerging adulthood. (217)

In order to sustain high levels of religious commitment and practice during the emerging adult years (18-23), several distinct factors seem especially important: first, strong *relational modeling and support* for religious commitment; second, genuine *internalization* of religious significance (importance of faith, religious experiences, no doubts); and third, the *personal practice* of religious faith (prayer). It appears that also important are

certain theological *belief commitments* (in miracles), more intensity of *personal practice* of religious faith (scripture reading), another form of *relational modeling and support* (more supportive adults in the congregation), and *paying certain costs* for one’s religious beliefs (abstaining from sex, being made fun or for faith). (217, 219)

A teenager who among his or her peers scored in the top one-quarter of a scale measuring these four factors—(1) *parental religion*, (2) *prayer*, (3) *importance of faith*, and (4) *scripture reading*—stands an 85% chance of landing in the Highest category of religion as an emerging adult; but one who scores in the Lowest one-quarter on that scale stands only a miniscule chance (0.4 percent) of landing at the high end of religion when he or she is 18-23 years old. In short, the combination of a teenager’s parent religion, importance of faith, prayer, and scripture reading makes an enormous substantive difference in religious outcomes during emerging adulthood. (220)

A teenager who scores in the top quarter of a scale measuring three more factors—(5) *having supportive nonparent adults in one’s religious congregation*, (6) *having religious experiences*, and (7) *not doubting religious faith*—stands 75 times the chance of landing in the Highest category of religion compared to one who scores in the bottom quarter. These three variables taken alone thus also make a big difference in the probability that a teenager will end up being highly religious as he or she grows into emerging adulthood. (220)

The Importance of Strong Parental Religion

Smith and Snell believe that strong parental religion is linked to higher emerging adult

religion through at least two social causal mechanisms—religious socialization and the avoidance of relational breakdown.

One obvious possibility is simple **religious socialization**—that teenagers with seriously religious parents are more likely that those without such parents to have been trained in their lives to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that that training “sticks” with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood. Emerging adults who grew up with seriously religious parents are through socialization more likely (1) to have internalized their parents’ religious worldview, (2) to possess the practical religious know-how needed to live more highly religious lives, and (3) to embody the identity orientations and behavioral tendencies toward continuing to practice what they have been taught religiously. At the heart of this social causal mechanism stands the elementary process of teaching—both formal and informal, verbal and nonverbal, oral and behavioral, intentional and unconscious, through both instruction and role modeling. We believe that one of the main ways by which empirically observed strong parental religion produced strong emerging adult religion in offspring is through the teaching involved in socialization. We think of this socialization as the “positive” side of the dynamic. But we also believe it is only part of the story.

A second social causal mechanism that we think connects strong parental religion to strong emerging adult religion is the more “negative” one of **the avoidance of relationship breakdown**. Most parents and children enjoy relationships—however imperfect—that they value and want to sustain. Parents and children in highly religious families, in fact, enjoy even closer and happier relationships than

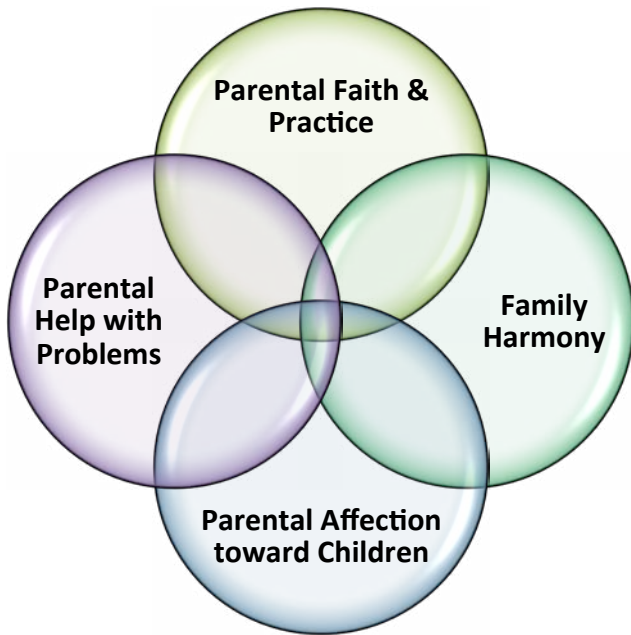
those of the national average. When it comes to parents, children, and religion, when religious faith and practice are particularly important to parents, it is usually the case that they want it to also be important in the lives of their children. When the children accept, embrace, and practice that religious faith, therefore, the relationship tends to be affirmed and sustained. When their children neglect or reject that religious faith, the relationship tends to be threatened. Children of seriously religious parents who are generally invested in avoiding relational breakdown therefore have an incentive not to disregard the religious faith and practice that they (usually accurately) believe their parents want them to continue. Unless some other overriding factor comes into play, therefore, the consequence of not believing and of living as a nonreligious person is too costly to accept. So we think that in part in this way, too, religious commitment and practice is reproduced from one generation to the next. (231-233)

Smith and Snell conclude that the lives of many teenagers who are transitioning into the emerging adult years reflect a lot more religious stability and continuity than is commonly realized. “The past continues to shape the future. This is important to know, because it means that *religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter—they make a difference*” (256).

Family & Household Faith

The “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” confirms the continuing influence of parents and the family on young people. Young people are influenced by the faith of their parents and family in a number

of significant, overlapping ways. These four overlapping influences describe the role of family and household faith.



Possessing Strong Parental Faith

Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith. A vital and informed parental faith includes understanding the Christian faith, participating in worship, praying, and engaging in service and mission. Young people are in households and relationships with parents where mature faith is cultivated and modeled.

The NSYR research tells us that parents will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves are. The strong, vital, mature faith of parents in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” congregations is surely one of the most important contributors to nurturing sons and daughters of vital, committed Christian faith. These are parents who are committed to Jesus Christ and experience the presence of God in their daily lives and relationships with others. Their faith helps them decide what is right or wrong and take responsibility for serving those in need. The most highly rated characteristics of the faith

of parents in the study are the listed below. (The highest rating is 9.)

- My faith helps me know right from wrong. (8.24)
- I have a sense of sharing in a great purpose. (8.20)
- I have had feelings of being in the presence of God. (8.12)
- I have a sense of being saved in Christ. (8.09)
- I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God’s creation. (7.89)
- God helps me decide what is right or wrong behavior. (7.88)
- I have found a way of life that gives me direction. (7.72)
- Religious faith is important in my life. (7.37)
- My life is committed to Jesus Christ. (7.72)
- My life is filled with meaning and purpose. (7.33)
- I have a real sense that God is guiding me. (7.30)
- I feel God’s presence in my relationships with other people. (6.87)
- I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually. (6.65)
- I try to apply my faith to political and social issues. (6.65)
- I talk with other people about my faith. (6.42)
- I give significant portions of time and money to help other people. (6.12)

Parents in the study seek out opportunities to grow spiritually. The overwhelming majority of parents are involved in spiritual support groups in their churches. They reported that they belonged to at least one church group in which others will prayer with them and for them as needed (7.23); in at least one church group in which they can talk about spiritual issues (6.99); and in at least one church group in which it is possible to talk about personal problems (5.88).

Promoting Family Faith Practices

Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life. Parents not only know and live Christianity themselves, they draw their teenagers into faith practices. Parents pray with their adolescents at table, at family celebrations, during times of crises and over individual and family decisions. Service is a way of life.

The “Effective Christian Education Study” (Search Institute. 1990) found that family religiousness was *the* most important factor in faith maturity.

Of the two strongest connections to faith maturity, family religiousness is slightly more important than lifetime exposure to Christian education. The particular family experiences that are most tied to greater faith maturity are the frequency with which an adolescent talked with mother and father about faith, the frequency of family devotions, and the frequency with which parents and children together were involved in efforts, formal or informal, to help other people. Each of these family experiences is more powerful than frequency with which an adolescent sees his or her parents engage in religious behavior like church attendance. (Benson and Eklin, 38)

The “Effective Christian Education Study” found that families that express faith do the following things: often talk about religious faith, often have family devotions, prayer, or Bible reading at home, and often have family projects to help other people.

The research also found that youth in families that often express faith do the following things *twice* as often as those families that do not express faith: read the Bible and pray when alone, read and study about the Christian faith, are spiritually

moved by the beauty of God’s creation, and have often felt God’s presence in their life.

Youth in families where faith is often expressed by a parent in word and deed are *three* times more likely to participate in family projects to help others and *twice* as likely to spend time helping other people than youth from families that did not express faith. Search Institute surveys of 217,000 sixth- to twelfth-grade youth in public schools (1999-2000) found that youth who say their parents “spent lots of time helping others” are almost twice as likely themselves to serve others. Among young people whose parents model helping, 61% volunteer at least one hour per week. Among those whose parents do not model helping, only 36% volunteer. People who live lives of service, justice, and advocacy often point to early experiences in their family as being normative.

Families that express faith also have an impact on participation in church life and service activities. Twice as many youth in families that express faith are involved in a church youth group, go to church programs or events that include children and adults, go to church camp or work camp, and regard a religious faith as a very or most important influence in life. Their attendance at worship services is almost 20% higher than youth from families that never express faith.

It is evident that youth who are most likely to mature in faith are those raised in homes where faith is part of the normal ebb and flow of family life. The “Effective Christian Education Study” provides convincing evidence of the power present in the religious practices of a home. Religious practices in the home virtually *double* the probability of a congregation’s youth entering into the life and mission of Christ’s church.

In the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” young people were asked how their parents influenced their faith life, they people identified six ways that parental faith influences them. Confirming the findings from the Effective Christian Education Study, five of the six influences

identified by the young people focus on family religiousness: talking about faith, serving others and God, and reading the Bible.

Parental Faith Influences	Mother	Father
1. Values are focused on serving others and God	7.41	6.88
2. Positive influence on my religious faith	7.23	6.21
3. Talked with me about my relationship with Jesus Christ	6.75	5.43
4. Attending Sunday worship	6.54	5.76
5. Talked with my parent about religious faith	4.89	3.95
6. Reading the Bible	4.10	3.48

When asked “How often does your family sit down together and talk about God, the Bible, or other religious things?” one in four young people said their family does this on a weekly or daily basis, and 40% once or twice a month. The combination of parental faith and parental faith influences promote a family which engages in faith practices at home. These are parents who read the Bible and pray with their teenagers, and include them in faith-informed discussions of family decision and budgets. Young people know about their parents’ vital faith not only from observing them at church, but also from conversations about faith in the midst of everyday life. Young people in exemplary congregations explore understandings of God and matters of faith in their families. Faith instruction in these congregations does not all occur in their youth ministries; families reinforce what’s learned at church through intentional faith practices and conversations at home.

Reflecting Family Harmony

Family members’ expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith. Families and households find ways to navigate the challenges and stresses of daily life with approaches marked by respect, equal regard, open communication, and cooperation. Parents, grandparents and others practice individual accountability,

forgiveness and reconciliation modeling faith in action and generating an atmosphere where faith can be referenced and discussed.

Young people in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” live in families where there is a high degree of family harmony as expressed in the interest that parents show their teens, close family relationships, and doing things as a family. In addition, young people experience parental affection from their parents and parental assistance with problems, They also experience a *lack* of parental verbal abuse. Each of these four features of family life influence the faith of young people and contribute to the development of a vital Christian faith in their lives.

Congregations Equipping Parents & Families

The congregations in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” ***offer instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equip parents for nurturing faith at home.*** Congregations provide strong adult faith formation, emphasizing adult discipleship and offering strong preaching, Bible studies, small groups and many forms of adult Christian education. Programs develop parental faith and prepare parents for nurturing the faith of their children and adolescents.

The congregations in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” ***offer parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.*** Parent-youth programs focus on adolescent-specific issues such as family communication, adolescent independence, decision-making, choosing friends, sexual expression, and conflict resolution; as well as faith themes such as studying the Bible together, discussing case studies from youth culture, and exploring popular media. Parent-youth programs enhance the capacity of parents and

teenagers to communicate and work together on matters of faith and life.

These congregations equip parents to pass on faith to their young people by:

- providing education and resources parents needed to teach their youth Christian concepts of right and wrong.
- showing parents how to foster the development of moral values in their teens.
- encouraging families to teach service as a way of life through their involvement in helping activities.
- encouraging parent-youth communication through classes on how to discuss adolescent issues with youth.
- helping youth and their parents deal with conflict.
- helping provide opportunities for teens and parents to interact.
- helping parents learn how to promote the faith of their children.
- helping parents share their faith with their youth at home by such things as rituals, faith conversations, etc.
- establishing a network of care and support for youth and their families

Conclusion

Family matters! Parental faith and influence matters! Family faith practices matter! The “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” clearly shows the continuing influence of parents and the family on the development of a vital Christian faith in young people. The parents in the study possess a mature, committed Christian faith and this has a profound influence on the lives of young people. Family faith practices—caring conversations, family devotions and prayer, family rituals and traditions, family service—influence the faith lives of young people. Congregations have a role to play by equipping parents to pass on faith and strengthening family relationships,

contributing to the influence of parents and the whole family on the development of youth of vital Christian faith. Given parents profound influence in the lives of their teens, youth ministries involved them directly in youth programs and activities, becoming a potential source of growth in faith for both teenagers and their parents.

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Developing the Faith of Parents & the Family

Use the following questions to explore how your congregation can enhance its ministries with parents and families during the childhood and adolescent years by reflecting on the five characteristics of Family and Household Faith identified in the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry.”

- How is your congregation currently addressing each of the five characteristics of Family and Household Faith during the childhood and adolescent years? Identify specific illustrations of how your congregation is addressing each characteristic.
- How can you enhance what you are already doing?
- Which areas need attention? How can you develop these?

Characteristics of Family and Household Faith

Possessing Strong Parental Faith: Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith.

A vital and informed parental faith includes understanding the Christian faith, participating in worship, praying, and engaging in service and mission. Young people are in households and relationships with parents where mature faith is cultivated and modeled.

Promoting Family Faith Practices: Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life.

Parents not only know and live Christianity themselves, they draw their teenagers into faith practices. Parents pray with their adolescents at table, at family celebrations, during times of crises and over individual and family decisions. Service is a way of life. Together parents and young people “turn their faces outward” and live life for others.

Reflecting Family Harmony: Family members’ expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith.

Families and households find ways to navigate the challenges and stresses of daily life with approaches marked by respect, equal regard, open communication, and cooperation. Parents, grandparents and others practice individual accountability, forgiveness and reconciliation modeling faith in action and generating an atmosphere where faith can be referenced and discussed.

Equipping Parents: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equip parents for nurturing faith at home.

Congregations provide strong adult faith formation, emphasizing adult discipleship and offering strong preaching, Bible studies, small groups and many forms of adult Christian education. Programs develop parental faith and prepare parents for nurturing the faith of their children and adolescents.

Fostering Parent-Youth Relationships: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.

Parent-youth programs focus on adolescent-specific issues such as family communication, adolescent independence, decision-making, choosing friends, sexual expression, and conflict resolution; as well as faith themes such as studying the Bible together, discussing case studies from youth culture, and exploring popular media. Parent-youth programs enhance the capacity of parents and teenagers to communicate and work together on matters of faith and life.

Strategies for Parent & Family Faith Formation

For the good of families and the whole Christian community, congregations can provide opportunities to equip homes as centers of faith formation at every stage of life. Congregations and age group ministries can make family faith formation a focus of everything they do as a church community, using an array of approaches and strategies to nurture faith at every stage of the family life cycle and in all the diverse forms and structures of the contemporary family. They can educate and enrich parents and the whole family to embed foundational religious practices—faith conversations, family devotions and prayer, Bible reading, service, and rituals and traditions—into the daily experience of family life. Congregations and youth ministries can strengthen the partnership between home and congregation by focusing on empowering, resourcing, and supporting the development of the family as the center of faith formation. To help your congregation strengthen its approach to families, here are several strategies that congregations are using effectively.

Strategy 1. Utilize church ministries and programming to teach, model, and demonstrate family faith practices, and then provide the resources for families to live the practice at home.

Churches can utilize Sunday worship and church programs and activities to teach, model, and demonstrate faith practices that families can incorporate into home life, and provide them with specific resources to live their faith at home. Weekly worship and church events are significant opportunities for families to experience faith practices—conversations, devotions and prayer, Bible reading and reflection, service, and rituals and traditions—which can be extended into the home.

Strategy 2. Involve the whole family in congregational life, programs, and leadership roles.

Most ministry activities of congregations have involved persons as individuals, not as families. What is missing in current practice are more ways families can participate *together* in the mission, ministries, and programs of the church. Start with ministries and programs where at least one family member is already active and incorporate family or parent-teen participation. Assess all of the possibilities in your congregation to promote whole-family experiences. Without adding more programming, congregations can involve the whole family. For example:

- Redesign children/adolescent Christian education programming or adult Bible study programs to incorporate family learning programs or parent-child/teen learning programs as an integral part of the program year.
- Involve the whole family in worship roles, such as reading the Scripture on Sunday, leading prayer, decorating the environment for worship, singing in the choir as a family, greeting people as they arrive for worship, collecting the offering, and so on.
- Redesign existing service projects for children, teens, and adults into whole-family service projects.
- Involve the whole family in congregational leadership, such as taking leadership roles in summer vacation Bible school or organizing the annual church festival.

Strategy 3. Offer family and intergenerational learning programs, as well as parent-child/teen programs.

Congregations can design programming that involves and engages the whole family in faith formation. In his report of the NSYR research (*Soul Searching*) Christian Smith observes, “Faith formation of children and teens would probably best be pursued in the larger context of family ministry, that parents should be viewed as indispensable partners in the religious formation of children and youth.” Most congregations would do well to transform their over-emphasis on age-group learning and incorporate family-centered learning programs or intergenerational learning programs, which involve the whole community: singles, couples, families with children/teens, empty nest families, and older adult families.

There are a number of possibilities for learning programs that involve the whole family and/or the whole community:

- monthly large group family or intergenerational learning programs (that can replace or be integrated with age-group programming)
- family workshops through the year focused on family faith practices, church year seasons, and/or family-focused topics
- family cluster or small group learning programs (at the church or in homes)
- family-centered (small group or large group) lectionary-based Scripture reflection
- family-centered or intergenerational vacation Bible school
- family retreats and camps
- family Bible study

Congregations can also plan programs for parents and children/adolescents on common areas of interest and need, such as communication, vocational decisions, cultural/media influences, social issues, and so on.

One model for family/intergenerational learning that is being used in churches incorporates the following elements:

1. Welcome, community building and opening prayer
2. Part 1: An All-Ages Learning Experience for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
3. Part 2: In-Depth Learning Experiences that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format*: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format*: learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format*: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
4. Part 3. An All-Ages Contributive Learning experience in which each generation teaches the other generations.
5. Part 4. Reflection on the learning experience and interactive group sharing.
6. Closing Prayer

(Source: *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald. New London: Twenty-Third, 2008).

Strategy 4. Develop family faith formation around life-cycle milestones.

Milestones are significant moments in life's journey that provide the opportunity for individuals and their families 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 provides a natural opportunity to create a partnership between the congregation and the home. Milestones faith formation uses four elements to shape this vital partnership:

- *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that are recognized in the life of a congregation and those that take place in our daily lives—our beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage—creates rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.
- *Equipping* brings the generations together, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. Opportunities are provided here to model faith practices for the home.
- *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.
- *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.

From childhood through adolescence a variety of milestones such as baptism, first prayers, start of school, First Communion, receiving a Bible, Confirmation, receiving a driver's license, and graduations (middle school, high school), provide an opportunity for family faith formation. For each milestone, a congregation can provide faith formation that includes: (1) rituals and traditions; (2) intergenerational learning programs (building community, inviting conversation, encouraging storytelling, providing information, and modeling faith practices for individual and families); (3) a blessing of the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home; and (4) 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 at home

For resources see:

Faith Stepping Stones. Faith Inkubators.

Milestones Ministry Manual for Home and Congregation. Vibrant Faith Ministries.

Bloomington: Vibrant Faith Ministries, 2007.

Shift—What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today. Haynes, Brian. Loveland: Group, 2009.

Take It Home: Inspiration and Events to Help Parents Spiritually Transform Their Children.

Mark Holmen. Ventura: Gospel Light, 2008.

Strategy 5. Offer a variety of developmentally-appropriate family or parent-teen service projects.

Congregations can offer a variety of developmentally-appropriate family or parent-child/teen service projects where families can choose from different levels of commitment from beginner experiences to advanced projects that are local, regional, national, and international. Each mission/service project includes a learning component that focuses on understanding the issue being addressed, exploring the teachings of Scripture and tradition, developing the skills for mission and service, and then, upon completion of the project,

reflecting upon the involvement. Mission projects are “developmental” with projects geared to different levels of involvement and challenge including:

- 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 10 to 14 days that provide the opportunity to be immersed for a longer period in the targeted community and culture

Strategy 6. Provide at-home resources for the core family faith practices.

Congregations can provide families with a variety of resources—print, audio, video, and online—to help families embed faith practices in family life at each stage of life, including resources for parents at each stage of life, for in-home celebration of church year feasts and seasons, for extending Sunday worship into the home, for celebrating milestones, for engaging in service, and so many more. Churches can use their websites and digital communication to resource and connect families, delivering timely faith formation resources to the home, providing social networking among families to share faith stories and practices, and providing support, for parents.

Strategy 7. Use the Internet to resource and connect families.

Congregations can create their own online presence (website) as the centerpiece of their online faith formation. They can deliver faith formation experiences and resources anytime and anywhere, reaching people wherever they go online (home, work, school, vacation, coffee house). They can also promote continuing faith growth and practice by using their online presence and digital communication tools to extend relationships and faith formation initiated in a face-to-face learning settings. Churches can use a variety of online digital media strategies for faith formation including:

- A resource center with daily, weekly and seasonal resources for the family, including faith conversation activities, family devotions and prayer, Bible reading activities, service projects, and rituals and traditions
- A parenting center with “how to” parenting articles and videos, faith enrichment resources, a “gathering space” for parents to interact, a blog staffed by parent mentors, parent-generated ideas and activities, links to highly rated parent and family websites
- A milestones and life transitions center with sections for each milestone/transition that include rituals, blessings, commentaries, personal stories, a “gathering space” for sharing stories and ideas
- A virtual chapel sharing not only audio and video clips of some of the sermons and other worship experiences but also extending it through the daily posting of images, songs, meditations, inspirational stories, prayers of the people, and online worship exercises.
- A calendar of events with locations, times, and descriptions, with Web-streamed audio and video recordings of select offerings.
- Themed “gathering spaces” for synchronous and asynchronous interaction, including live text-based chat and live audio/video conferences, threaded discussions, collected blog links, self-paced tutorials on a range of topics, and so on.

- A community directory that includes “home pages” with pictures, contact information, and other self-determined personal information. Each individual can include more of his or her personal dreams, goals, and activities through statements or interactive blogs.
- A library pod with access to e-journals, e-books, archived streaming video of speakers and events, a clearinghouse-type collection of links to resources, and other Internet-mediated resources.
- A mission/service opportunity clearinghouse for local, national, and international internships, volunteer opportunities, and jobs.
- A learning center with courses and webinars on topics such as faith themes, Bible studies, life issues, and Christian practices, self-paced and facilitated by church staff and church members at scheduled times.
- Small group gatherings online for faith sharing, Bible study, and book discussions

Strategy 8. Focus on parents—parent faith formation and parental training.

Congregations can equip parents of teenagers for their parenting roles and sharing faith with teens through classes, workshops, retreats, and/or support groups. These could include such things as parenting classes, parent-youth discussion times, parent support groups, seminars for parents of younger youth as they enter adolescence, seminars for parents of older youth as they provide for college, and so forth. Churches can provide stand-alone parent programs, as well as incorporating parent faith formation and parent education into existing faith formation programs and support groups for parents.

Parent workshops and educational programs need to have content that is relevant to parents and processes that help parents learn and want to participate in new learning. Here are several tips for designing and leading effective educational experiences for parents.

- Create a supportive, caring environment for learning. Greet parents, provide time for them to get acquainted with one another, and encourage mutual support during and after the experience.
- Actively engage parents in the learning. The amount they learn will be in direct proportion to how much they put into the experience.
- Let parents be the experts. Show that you value their knowledge and experience by giving them opportunities to contribute to the learning experience.
- Tie the learning activities around the parents’ experiences and values so they know “this is for me and about my family.”
- Focus the content on real needs, issues, and concerns, not just on content that parents ought to know. If, for example, you want to help parents teach their child/teen about healthy concepts of right and wrong, first identify the ways this connects with parents’ needs or concerns regarding moral values, then develop the experience to reflect those concerns.
- Include information and skills parents can put into action immediately. Such application reinforces and helps parents internalize what they learn.
- Demonstrate how to use skills and practices during the program so that parents have a direct experience of how to use the skills or practice at home.
- Provide resources that parents can use for their own personal growth and with their family. Consider developing a parent website with resources and links to websites to enhance and expand the learning experience.



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