



Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

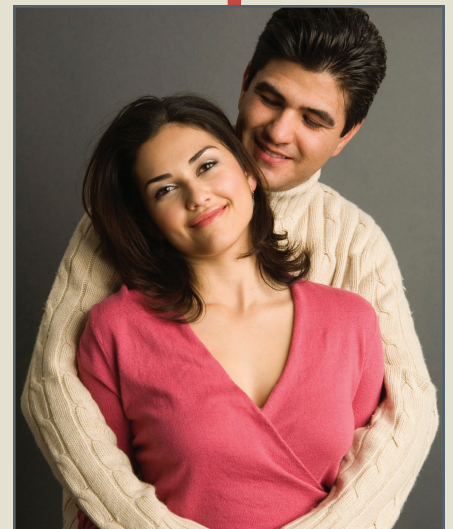
Volume 7.4

www.lifelongfaith.com

Winter 2013



TRENDS & DEVELOPMENTS IN FAITH FORMATION



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LifelongFaith Associates

40 Brighton Road, Naugatuck, CT 06770

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Growing Faith: Adults in an Evangelizing Church

February 5 – February 25

This guided conversation around the *C21 Resources* issue, “Growing Faith for an Evangelizing Church,” explores the nature of evangelization and its practical implications. This workshop features ten articles with recommendations and resources to support adults in their journey of faith, and to support parishes as they strive to be and become places of evangelization.

Intimacy throughout Life: A Catholic Perspective

March 5 – March 25

Join a guided conversation around the *C21 Resources* Spring 2014 issue that addresses intimacy in its expansive meaning. Not only will the workshop explore the culturally predominant understanding of intimacy as the closeness of a sexual relationship, but it also will examine intimacy between generations, in families, among friends, and with God.

Pope Francis' Interview: Continuing the Conversation

March 12 – April 8

This workshop is designed to contextualize Pope Francis' interview, “A Big Heart Open to God,” conducted for worldwide Jesuit journals in August, 2013. Discussion will be centered on the text of two interviews, and the insightful video comments of John Allen, Jr., Fr. Michael Himes, and others. The final week of the workshop will focus on the role of women in the Church.

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What is Faith Formation in a Missional Age?

A Conversation Starter

Terri Elton

Faith is a gift from God, a gift which informs, forms and transforms. Faith is a given and an unfolding mystery, a foundation and something to be nurtured, about salvation and life in this world, is personal and communal. As 1 Corinthians 13:13¹ reminds us, faith is a dynamic, multi-faceted reality which is not fully understood this side of heaven yet guides a Christian's life on earth.

Christians live in the world, a world where God's kingdom is unfolding, but not fully realized. In this now and not yet reality, God's people are offered an eternal relationship with the Creator and promised salvation, while remaining within a sinful world. God is present in this world and freely offers faith to all people. In this way, Christians are passive in faith. Yet faith is more than passive reception. Faith stirs within as it also summons response. In this way, Christians are active in faith. Through faith God's people join God's work in the world as they participate in God's ongoing creative and redemptive mission. This work includes fostering faith or equipping "people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

The Christian Faith

Several things can be said about the Christian faith. For our purposes, three key ideas will be lifted up.

Christianity is an embodied faith, a lived faith. Faith inhabits human beings who live in the world God created. This reality is most evident in the incarnation—in God coming to earth in the person of Jesus. In Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God's love and promises broke into the

Terri Elton, Ph.D. is director of the Center for Children, Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary and associate professor of Children, Youth and Family Ministry. Her research and teaching interests include: congregational leadership, leading in the midst of change and conflict, helping ministry leaders craft a missional ecclesiology with an eye toward the First Third of Life, awakening a vibrant theology of baptism and vocation and reimagining faith and mission practices for children, youth, young adults and their families.

world in the flesh. Jesus' life centered on sharing God's love, inviting people into a relationship with God and announcing the kingdom of God was near. Today the church, the body of Christ post-resurrection, is commanded to continue proclaiming and embodying God's love and promises, making God's people God's hands and feet. The church is the sign, foretaste and instrument of God's love in the world.

Our life and identity as Christians is rooted in faith in God. Faith summons people to see themselves as subjects of God's love; faith invites people into a two-way relationship with God; and faith informs the way Christian's live. Faith, at its core, is a relationship, born out of love and offered as a gift to all. This relationship gives Christians their identity as children of God and orients their life by placing it in God's hands, not the world's. Yet faith does more than inform Christian identity, it also forms and transforms life. Faith calls people to not only love themselves, but also to love and serve their neighbor. A life of faith draws people outside themselves and into the world. Hence, faith is a communal venture, as it is also personal. This reality comforts as well as challenges. Faith matters for Christians as it's a given, providing identity, and a dynamic relationship, guiding and sending people into the world.

Christian's embodied faith exists in the midst of a broken world. Pain and suffering are present realities, yet people of faith see beyond the present, informed by a different story. As God's people rest in their identity in God, not the promises of the world, they provide hope. As signs and instruments of God's love, God's people witness in a broken world as they proclaim the gospel and serve others. The church, as a living community, is called to translate the good news of God's love to every generation in every era. Being God's people in a broken world means telling God's story, again and again in new and different ways. Being the church requires connecting current experiences to the larger story of God's people across time and place. Being the church involves God's people gathered in Christian

practices holding their identity in Christ. And being the church includes God's people scattered in the world, putting God's creative and redemptive love into action.

The World We Find Ourselves In

The church has always had a ***call to the world***—to love one's neighbor and make disciples of all nations. Being a church sent into the world means cultivating Christian community along with engaging culture. This multi-faceted posture requires both knowing the Christian story and participating in Christian practices, as well as being in, for, with and against the world. The early church did this work primarily outside the host culture and the mainstream of religion or politics. But in the fourth century, when Constantine the Great was converted to Christianity, the Christian church began experiencing a shift, moving from being a sect (or minority) religion to being a state/national (or majority) religion. In the centuries that followed,² religious and political leaders often worked together, intertwining spiritual and civic matters. While there were benefits to this relationship, there were also many liabilities. One liability was blurring the lines between the work of government and religion. As the church operated from a majority position, it became accustom to engaging the world with certain "privileges." These "privileges" included support, resources and power. Within the Western church, this reality of Christianity being aligned with the host culture is referred to as Christendom. In Christendom, the church's call to the world relied heavily on institutional structure, organizational mechanisms, and specialized leadership.

While the United States was founded on the separation of church and state it has operated in a de facto Christendom environment, with Christian ideals occupying a majority view. This reality resulted in the church being accustom to the host culture

being ripe for fostering a Christian way of life, at least until the past 50 years. As the United States has continued welcoming diverse groups of people, it has had the opportunity to exercise its commitments to religious freedom. As a result, the United States has experienced a growing religious pluralism. In this environment the Christian church has been forced to reexamine its relationship with the host culture. Accustomed to working with the host culture, overlapping language, life patterns and values, the Christian church is now discovering it is no longer in the center, aligned with the dominant power and supported by civil society. This shift, subtle in some areas and abrupt in others, has created an opportunity within the church to rediscovering its identity and mission practices.³

The call of the church to love God and one's neighbor plays out differently outside the center, without the resources of the host culture. Today society does not necessarily aspire to biblical values. Life patterns which reinforce a Christian lifestyle can no longer be assumed within school systems or the business world. And the language of faith, once understood in congregations and civil society, is now foreign to many. This is the missional era in which Christians live. Being a church sent into the world without the infrastructure of the host culture and with diminishing institutional support requires rethinking the church's posture toward the world, revisiting the role of faith communities and being open to learning new skills which help people discover a Christian way of life.⁴ So, ***while the work of the church today is the same, the relationship with the host culture has changed, causing the church to reimagine its work.***

What Is Faith Formation in a Missional Era?

In its history, the church has had to rediscover its sent nature and mission practices many

times. Today is one such time. The activities associated with the sent character of the church, once charged to a specialized group of people, have reemerged as a call for all of God's people and this call is being lived out within an environment where the Christian faith is less prominent. Yet the deep questions humans have about life have not gone away. At work, in school, and in neighborhoods people struggle to find meaning and identity in a broken world; pain and despair are wide spread and people long for hope and healing. Such moments not only highlight the missional reality in our midst, but also the opportunity for people of faith to witness to God's love. God's people are present in such moments every day. Yet how is faith informing and transforming these times? And, on a larger scale, how might Christians witness to God's love and promise in this missional era?

Today the work of translating the good news of God's love is located in the hands of all Christians. This is part of what it means to be church today. And this is an asset in a missional era. But what does it mean for the church to be the body of Christ not only when it is gathered, but also when it is scattered? As the church lives into its minority position, the practices which help Christians hold their unique Christian identity need to be revisited and refreshed, as do the skills and aptitudes needed to live a Christian life.

Faith formation in a missional age will be both similar and different to faith formation in other eras. Discovering what stays the same and what needs to be reinvented requires the whole body of Christ to return to the basics and engage in experiments; it will require risk and discernment. As the church lives into this time, two basics will be critical: revisiting our view of faith and exploring what it means to be a gathered and sent people.

Revisiting Our View of Faith

Faith is a gift, a relationship with God, which informs, forms and transforms. Faith is about salvation, or life after death, as it is

also about life on earth. Hence, faith formation in a missional age begins by revisiting our view of faith. Faith is robust and dynamic and has at least four dimensions.⁵

- ◆ **Faith as a gift.** Faith is a gift from God, a gift which saves and provides identity. Martin Luther wrestled with this issue, reminding himself and generations to come that Christians are justified by faith alone. There is nothing humans can do to earn this gift! Salvation is ours. This dimension of faith secures the future, while it also informs and forms the present. For Christians, faith creates a hybrid identity. This hybrid identity is known as being paradoxically saint and sinner. Christians humbly accept this gift of faith from God, while continuing to live as sinners. Receiving this gift names each human person child of God, and sets them on a journey of discovering a Christian way of life. Faith as a gift is simple and mysterious, unfolding over a lifetime.
- ◆ **Faith as compass.** Faith informs the Christian way of life. As faith is embodied, particular human experiences become the occasion for God's creative and redemptive love to be revealed in the world. In other words, faith is not just about salvation—or life after death, in heaven (eternal), but also about every day matters – or life on earth (temporal). Because faith is a relationship, not a set a rules, people of faith are constantly discerning what a Christian would say or do in any given situation. God's Word and Christian communities come alongside individual Christians, as current situations are put into conversation with particular understandings of God. Faith as compass is an internal and external activity; it's at work implicitly, as well as explicitly.

- ◆ **Faith as witness.** The Christian faith is a relational affair, always and only within community, with a public dimension. And Christian witness is part of a larger story, drawing from the past and extending into the future, while rooted in the present moment. People of faith are the body of Christ in the world as they come together to be light in the darkness or share their faith one-on-one in the world. Christians witness to their relationship with God in many ways. This witness may include proclaiming God's Word, giving testimony to one's faith or putting faith into action through serving one's neighbor.
- ◆ **Faith as agent.** Empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's people are not only subjects of God's love, but agents as well. As faith informs, forms and transforms individuals and communities it evokes agency. Faith calls forth active engagement with the world, the world which God created. This world seeks rich, abundant life within its broken, sinful reality. God loves the world, and people of faith in a relationship with God cannot help but get caught up in this love, turning their agency to the world. As people of faith, Christians are invited to join God in God's most precious mission—caring for the world. This mission is about fostering and sustaining life, as well as righting wrongs and reconciling brokenness.

Exploring What It Means to Be a Gathered and Sent People

Faith formation in a missional age involves exploring what it means to be a people gathered and sent. Living into and out of this gathered and sent rhythm is central for discovering a Christian way of life. Gathered God's people come to know God's story, engage in Christian practices, live in relationship with other people of faith, and discover their identity as children of God. Yet God's people live most of their lives scattered in the world. In the world God's people encounter others, with diverse stories, values and beliefs; in the world God's people see and experience injustice and pain, as they also have opportunities to nurture life and exercise agency. Attending to the rhythm of gathering and scattering is central for the church as it reimagines faith formation in a missional age. This pattern, more than any program or educational endeavor, provides the "curriculum" for faith formation. As the church attends to helping people discover a Christian way of life, gathered and sent, it will be faced with rethinking its posture toward the world, reimagining the role of faith communities, and discovering new skills and aptitudes.

- ◆ **Posture toward the world.** While people of faith have always lived with a hybrid identity, living in a missional age means embracing our call to *be* and *live* as strangers and aliens, similar to our Old Testament ancestors. Christians live in this world, but are not defined by it. Richard Bliese suggests the missional posture of Christianity is being in, with, for, and against the world.⁶ This posture requires Christians to live in the midst of multiple cultures, fostering their own way of life as they also learn to navigate and speak into other ways of life. Minimally, Christians must learn

what it means to live Christian, as they are present in and engaged with the host (or dominate) culture. In reality, most people live within multiple, complex cultures. A missional posture sees the world as God's, but also see its sin and injustice. Being people of faith witnessing to God's creative and redemptive love in the world means accompanying, as well as condemning; fostering, as well as reconciling. Living out this call from a minority position requires courage, humility, and improvisation. Use the language of faith as an example. "Walter Brueggemann argues that the cultural conditions of postmodernity require the church to function as a bilingual community, conversant in both the traditions of the church and the narratives of the dominant culture."⁷ Translating the Gospel across languages is more than finding the right words; good translation requires a broad understanding of many cultural dynamics. Cultural intelligence, therefore, is critical for Christians as they navigate the dominant culture, as well as various subcultures, inviting conversations among and between cultures.⁸ As faith is lived, embodied in humans and established as a way of life, doctrine and rituals take on flesh and become a public witness.

- ◆ **Reimagining the role of faith communities.** As Christianity recognizes its minority status, the importance of dynamic faith communities, which collectively embody a Christian way of life, is heightened. Christian communities—places where people can learn the language and practices of faith—are vital for Christian identity to be discovered and fostered. Kenda Creasy Dean notes that Christians have a peculiar God-Story to claim,⁹ and without vibrant communities of faith

this story does not become generative and bear witness in the world. Lesslie Newbigin says the congregation is a hermeneutic of the gospel—the place where everyday people live into and out of the radical promises of the gospel in a broken world.¹⁰ This public communal witness is critical for the on-going sustaining life of the church. Seeing and participating in living communities make the Gospel promises possible. Vibrant communities of faith exercise their agency by being in, with, for and against the world. People, not programs, are central in these communities, for they are the best translators of the Gospel. And congregations which invoke their missional imagination are best suited for bearing witness to God’s radical love.¹¹

- ◆ **Discovering new skills and aptitudes.** As Christians live as aliens and strangers, navigating multiple cultures and translating the Gospel in word and deed, they discover new skills and aptitudes are needed. Living Christian, when the host culture and the lived faith community are not aligned, is complicated and can be difficult. Once Christians discussed current issues within an environment where Christian values were shared. Now not only are Christian values not shared in much of society, but many do not even know, or care about, the Christian story. Hence engaging in conversation about faith requires the ability for all Christians to be able to share the Christian story in the language of the people, as they also stand up for their beliefs. These circumstances require not only knowing the story, but also the ability to tell the story in one’s own words. In the past, faith formation was primarily as an intellectual endeavor, providing education for the practices and

relationships already in existence. Today faith formation includes creating and tending relationships, inviting and accompanying people in learning the Christian story, and being able to share this story with others, especially those of other religions and religious traditions. Faith formation is teaching Christian faith traditions, but it also entails helping people explore other faith traditions. It is messy and mysterious, as it is wonderful and surprising.

Where Do We Go from Here?

What does this mean for ministry with children, youth, young adults and their families?

Faith formation has not looked the same throughout the history of the Christian church. In the church’s recent history within the United States, congregations have relied heavily on shared methods or models, i.e. Sunday School or confirmation. While these methods and models have morphed over time, responding to and adapting to cultural needs, this approach to faith formation is no longer sufficient. Radical shifts need to take place. Faith formation in a missional age will require much more contextualization and creativity. It may draw from the past, but the church must be willing to reimagine. As people of faith seek to discover God’s activity in their midst and discern their place within it, risk and innovation will be critical. Such work will seek to extend old practices, as it also introduces new ones. Yes, some practices do transcend particular contextual experiences, but how they are embodied will vary. And, as in any time of major transition, there is a danger of too quickly transferring new discoveries into universal practices. This missional time needs experimenting, remembering, inviting and awakening. Drawing from the past, with an

eye toward the future, faith formation in a missional age must be planted in the present circumstances. Our current circumstances call for creativity and collaboration.

In the months and years ahead, congregational leaders attending to faith formation are invited into this holy and inventive time; a time to risk, experiment and learn. The church, at its best, will explore this work together, in various locations and with its best resources, and will share its learnings along the way.

Gather a team in your congregation and/or a group of colleagues in your area and engage in a conversation about the future of faith formation. Consider the following sets of questions:

- ◆ What questions are most pressing for your ministry as you attend to faith formation in this missional era?
- ◆ What challenges are you experiencing regarding faith formation?
- ◆ What opportunities or invitations do these challenges present?

- ◆ What faith formation experiments have your faith community found to been the most fruitful?
- ◆ What key discoveries have emerged from this experiment?
- ◆ What are some innovative ways your ministries are practicing faith formation?
- ◆ How is the network supporting innovation in this time?

- ◆ What skills and abilities are helping people discover a Christian way of life in this missional age?
- ◆ What resources are needed to continue creating, expanding and learning from innovative opportunities for faith formation?
- ◆ What might this mean for the church at-large?

End Notes

- ¹ “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”
- ² It is noted this story is not descriptive of all areas of the world. This story describes the orientation of Western Christianity.
- ³ John Roberto, in *Faith Formation 2020*, identifies eight driving forces which are impacting the church and faith formation. These forces are: declining number of Christians and a growing number of people who identify with “no religious affiliation,” increasing number people who identify as of “spiritual” but not “religious,” decreasing number of people participating in Christian churches, increasing diversity and pluralism in the United States, increasing impact of individualism of Christian identity and community participation, changing marriage and family life patterns, declining socialization of family religiosity, and increasing impact of technology and digital media. For more, see *Faith Formation 2020*, Appendix, 26-39.
- ⁴ Anthony Robinson sums up the effects of Christendom with six shifts: “1. *Conversion and formation* declined because a person was Christian by virtue of citizenship, birth, and residence. This meant that the Christian faith was a social given rather than a choice or conscious commitment. 2. Christianity no longer found its primary embodiment in *congregations*, but in *territories and nations*. 3. *Mission* was not an inherent characteristic of every congregation that belonged to all its members; rather, mission was something done by specially designated ‘missionaries’ in territories or nations that were not Christian. 4. The *purpose* of a church was to provide religious services to a particular local population. 5. The ministry of the church increasingly was performed by and belonged to *religious professionals*, whose roles was in many ways comparable to that of civil servants or government officials. 6. *Society* (or culture) and *faith* (Christianity) overlapped to such an extent that being a

good Christian and being a good citizen were equivalent, and each defined the other.” Anthony Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: a third way for congregations*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008, 21. For more on this topic I commend this book and his ten conversations.

- ⁵ For more on this see, Mark Edwards, Jr. “Characteristically Lutheran Leanings?,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol 41, No 1, Spring 2002.
- ⁶ Characteristically Lutheran Leanings?,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol 41, No 1, Spring 2002. For more on this, see Richard Bliese, “The Mission Matrix,” *Word & World*, Vol. 26, Summer 2006, 237-249.
- ⁷ “Brueggemann maintains that taking part in both conversations is crucial for people of faith, and Christian formation must result in a bilingual consciousness.” *Ibid.*, 113.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, part 2.
- ⁹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 112.
- ¹⁰ I confess that I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on

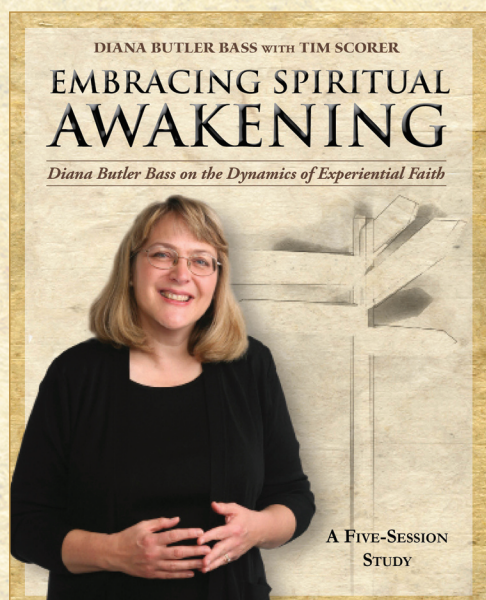
public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989, 227. He goes on to name 6 characteristics of such communities: community of praise, community of truth, community concerned for its neighborhood, community that prepares and exercises the priesthood in the world, community of mutual responsibility, and community of hope. (227-233)

- ¹¹ For more see Dean, *Almost Christian*.
- ¹² If you are interested in the latest report on religious affiliation, especially among young adults, see the Pew Research Center Study, “Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Face Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012. Available online.

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Cultivating a Community of Practice

Joyce Ann Mercer

The best curriculum for forming children, youth, and anyone else in Christian faith is guided participation in a community of practice.

What's the best curriculum for forming children and youth in Christian faith? Here's the short version of my response: *We invite people into the way of life that embodies God's love, justice, compassion, and reconciliation, by being, doing, and thinking about it together.* The best curriculum for forming children, youth, and anyone else in Christian faith is *guided participation in a community of practice* where people are vibrantly, passionately risking themselves together in lives of faith in a world crying out for the love of Christ.

Guided participation in a community of practice puts a premium on both participation and practice. Watch children in play imitating the adults around them to see how even the youngest among us hunger to participate in the way of life they see enacted before them. That's a good instinct to follow, because people—children or otherwise!—don't become Christian by learning *about* what Christians do, say, or think (although at some point, particularly in adolescence and beyond, doing so can be an important part of deepening one's faith identity). We become Christian, taking on the identity of one who is a disciple of Jesus, by acting the way Christians act, and by talking the way Christians talk. Over time through practice, even our hearts and minds are formed in this way of life.

Joyce Ann Mercer is a practical theologian with over two decades of experience with children and young people in local churches and in children's hospitals and teen clinics. She is a teacher, writer, speaker, pastor, social worker, and activist on the faculty of Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, VA, and also the mother of three teens. Her books include *Girl Talk God Talk: Why Faith Matters to Teenage Girls--and Their Parents* (Jossey Bass, 2008), and *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (Chalice, 2005), and (with Dori Baker) co-author of *Lives to Offer: Accompanying Youth on Their Vocational Quests* (The Pilgrim Press, 2007). Visit her website at www.joycemerger.com.

This article appeared as part of the "Passing on the Faith: Teaching the Next Generation" Symposium on Patheos.com: www.patheos.com/Topics/Passing-on-the-Faith.html. Read all of the articles online.

How does this work? Let me offer an example from another life arena, music. I'm a fiddle player in an Irish band. I did not start life as a musician. It is an identity that has been shaped and formed through participation in practice. Years ago as a child, guided by those who were already musicians, I clumsily held my instrument and drew the bow across the strings in hopes of making a sound worth hearing. I learned the language that musicians use to make sense of what they do by hanging out with musicians. Over time, I "became" a musician. My hands, formed over the years by daily practice at whatever level of ability I had at the time, took on the shape and action of musician's hands. My ears began to hear the music in the way that musicians hear, and I began to play as a fiddle player.

Making music, especially Irish music, now resides in my mind and heart. It has been a journey, one that I am still on. But over the years of guided participation in practice within a community of experienced musicians, I have taken on this identity. In a similar way, participation with a community in practices of neighbor-love, worship, and stewarding resources takes central place in Christian formation, shaping a person's hands and feet, heart and mind, to constitute a way recognizable as Christian. Children and youth need to be in a vibrant community where faith is practiced, and where they are invited into the practices, to take on the identity of being Christian.

As a "curriculum" of faith, guided participation in practice is not mere socialization through osmosis, as if just showing up were enough to form people in an identity. Showing up matters. But we already know that socialization alone leaves people doing lots of stuff without understanding why or what it means. Christian practices of celebrating the Lord's Supper make little sense to an outside observer unfamiliar with the story in which they are embedded, a story in which Jesus renders all ordinary eating holy by telling his disciples "whenever you do this, do it in remembrance of me." The story makes sense of the action; the action gives meaning to the

story. Just as "showing up" alone is not enough, "thinking about faith" alone is insufficient for forming disciples.

Guided participation in practice isn't just doing. It includes sharing an essential skill, that of fully and actively practicing our faith in our everyday lives *and* making theological meaning out of the stuff of everyday life. Sickness, birth, aging, celebrating new jobs, gay marriage, deciding how to spend money, wondering how to make sure everyone has enough clean water, celebrating birthdays, suffering (ours and that of other people), how and what we eat, institutional racism, how we dispose of our trash, dealing with failed marriages and celebrating life-giving ones, job layoffs, and all the rest that is part and parcel of our everyday lives in the world—we Christians need to cultivate the skill of making sense of these experiences through the lenses of our faith stories that can in turn inform our actions. For that, we need places and ways to learn and inhabit faith stories.

When people ask me about the best curriculum for forming the faith of children and youth, they may not like what they hear back from me. I "get" why my response is so unsatisfying. I'm not making it easy on committee chairs who need to buy materials for next year's programs by endorsing a particular brand of curricular material. There's an important place for choosing good material. But the best classroom experience cannot take root if it is not embedded in a community life in which all kinds of people join together to practice being God's love, justice, compassion, and reconciliation.



Emerging Media and the Gospel

Tom Tomaszek

*An effective online presence is not only a means of communication,
but an invitation to discipleship.*

Facebook, Twitter, and an attractive website aren't just trendy technologies. They are tools you can use to create a pastoral presence online—a presence that touches everyone in your parish and in your local community. Emerging media provide new ways to communicate and invite others to discipleship

It has been nearly fifty years since the councilors of Vatican II refocused the Catholic Church's approach to contemporary culture in *Gaudium et Spes*, a *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Embracing the developments of modern culture and technology of their time as opportunities to meet Christ, the councilors reminded "...the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel." (*Gaudium et Spes* #4)

The signs of the times *have* changed a great deal in those fifty years, but the role of the church in this regard remains the same. In fact, Pope Francis raised the ante recently with this challenge: "*We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, when so many are waiting for the Gospel. It is not enough simply to open the door in welcome...we must go out through the door to seek and meet the people.*" He goes on to say, "*Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter! I would like you to be almost obsessed about this.*" (Remarks made at World Youth Day 2013, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Tom Tomaszek is Pastoral Director and co-founder of The Five Loaves (www.thefiveloaves.com). Tom is an author, composer, educator, and liturgical musician. He is a sought after presenter for national and regional events and retreats. Tom's experience in teaching, pastoral ministry, and music publishing make for presentations that are relevant, insightful, and inspiring. He is versed in a breadth of topics, and has a particular passion for spirituality, prayer, and worship for all ages. Tom holds Masters degrees in both Theological Studies and Education

A Special Invitation: *The Five Loaves* is launching a faith-based project consulting service called *Emerging Media and the Gospel* that aims to walk churches through the process of revitalizing their website and use of social media. The initiative will focus on establishing a vision, team and implementing a Pastoral Communications Plan for your parish or church. They are seeking parishes or churches to serve as host sites for area gatherings. You can find our more at www.thefiveloaves.com/emg.

Emerging Media, Encountering Culture

The new media and “apps” available to us online and through mobile devices provide increased capability by which we can “go (out) through the door to seek and meet the people.” Where once it took full generations to evolve new forms of communication and corresponding creativity, today’s digital tools are constantly emerging and offer continuously evolving capabilities. Raise your hand if you remember filmstrip projectors (ding) or cassette tape recorders or the ubiquitous “ditto” machines. Subtract points if you still have one in your supply closet!

But beyond timely innovation, the medium *incarnates* the message (apologies to Marshall McLuhan.) The emerging and now-widely available media allow us to encounter others in faith in ways not previously possible. In fact, in today’s digital world, they are as necessary a means of communication as telling parables and stories were for Jesus. He certainly used the moments and methods available to encounter the people of his time. He *became* the message and medium of salvation.

A Sacramental Presence

Permit me to offer this theological equation: We hold that Jesus was the first sacrament of God’s Love. We believe that the church, instituted by Christ, continues as the primary sacrament of his presence on earth. We understand that the local church—through its physical structure and through the lives of its members—becomes a visible and immediate way we experience that sacramental presence of Christ in our lives. We know, in our mediated culture, so much of our lives are now lived *online*. We must embrace the challenge to *encounter* others in faith *online*, as our website and social media extend and *become a sacramental presence* of Christ.

Ready or not, your website *is* an extension of who you are as Church in your geographical area and beyond. We have to stop treating these new capabilities as simply “nice things to have if we have time for them.” The Gospel demands more, requires our best efforts. The emerging media are essential tools to provide information and *formation* to soul-seekers as well as sustaining members.

Beyond a Generational Mindset

One big hurdle to committing time, talent and treasure to utilizing the emerging media for the sake of the Gospel is our preconceived *misperceptions* about who is the intended audience. We might think, “Isn’t all that Internet stuff just something that kids do?” Yes, and, that alone would be reason enough to take great action to be online to evangelize the next generations.

However, the use of the emerging media is remarkably widespread across all demographics. In a previous article for this journal, I took note of a recent survey completed by CARA at Georgetown University:

- ◆ Those responding said they spent from nearly *two* hours (for those born before 1943) to nearly *four* hours (for those born after 1981) per day online.
- ◆ The majority of those polled use email, almost half the respondents send text messages, and between 70% and 90% visit their favorite social media site at least once a week.

What are the implications of this research for churches? Two things seem clear: First, improving, promoting and actively using the your website is a ideal strategy for creating a sacramental presence that can reach anyone and everyone, and second, finding a way to communicate simply through email and text will enable you to touch the vast majority of your members on a regular and consistent basis.

Beyond the Bulletin Board: Markers of A Sacramental Presence

What are the markers of a sacramental presence online? I suggest that to be *sacramental* our online presence must go beyond the delivery of information to creating moments of *encounter* in the lives of the people. This is what Jesus lived.

Most churches understand the usefulness of a website as an information bulletin board answering frequently asked questions such as worship times, location, and who to call for a Baptism, wedding or funeral. These days, that bulletin information is usually front and center on your website.

But in this Google age (where “to Google” is a verb) if I want to know Sunday worship times, I’ll simply *Google* it and my smartphone already knows where I live and what time it is and what churches may be close by. I don’t need to interact with you, know your parish or pastor name, or act upon any of the information I receive. It’s a pretty passive connection. No encounter required.

What I can’t *Google* is your stimulating question that asks me to reflect on my week, or gets me to think about how God is active in my life, or gives me the chance to interact with others who are facing the same spiritual issues that are confronting my life. A sacramental presence is *incarnational*. It wants to find a home in my life and invite me to become part of something more as a community of disciples.

A sacramental presence is also, by its nature, *communal*. It invites believers and seekers to share their stories of grace and blessing—to see and hear the Good News. How might we use the emerging media to create forums that engage disciples *and* seekers in responding to Jesus’ call to “come and see” and “go and tell?” A sacramental presence challenges individuals to act for the common good and celebrates those moments in story and ritual.

A sacramental presence offers the community opportunities to reflect on the

things that matter both individually and collectively, and provides resources of formation, learning, discovery and ultimately—a call to action to be the Good News of Christ in the world. This is the essence of “go and make disciples.”

The biblical story of the five loaves and two fish demonstrated that miracles happen when people come together to share their resources and talents. Your church’s website can be a *virtual hillside* where resources can be shared and people can come together to seek spiritual wisdom, vitalize their ministries and share their talents.

The website should be linked through the social media to valuable content of all sorts from the pastor’s last homily to the youth minister’s blog to articles from church publications. It can be a vital tool to step out “through the door,” to invite people to discipleship. The dynamic connection between websites and social media is essential.

Church Website Basics

Most church websites are built backwards. They are focused on ministries instead of the people those ministries hope to serve.

What makes an effective church website? Effective is in the eye of the beholder! That’s why most church websites that I view seem to be built in reverse. They are focused on information we want to tell people – all well and good – but don’t consider enough what spiritually hungry people want to hear and see: Inspire me. Challenge me. Humor me. Inform me. Connect me. Help me make meaning of my experience of mystery, my spiritual journey. Challenge me to make a difference.

Setting aside the notion of obligation, isn’t that why people show up on Sundays? They hunger for a Word that speaks to their heart and preaching that puts the week in perspective. They thirst for art, music and ritual that delight the spiritual imagination. They long to be nourished by the Bread of Life.

They have hopes and dreams, doubts and questions, and want to see and experience Jesus Christ as the source and summit of their lives, and feel part of a community of disciples.

Your parish website is *sacramental* when it embraces these spiritual hungers in real time, *between Sundays*, and is *essential* to who you are as a community of believers.

It may be helpful to consider that there are differences between how church members and visitors interact with your website. Parish members come to your site for formation as well as information. Using your site to provide multi-media content that is instructive and formational elevates its value for members significantly over a site that just announces worship and meeting times.

Your members also come to your site for the opportunity to connect, to interact. Creating a safe place for members to interact online enhances and extends their experience of community. Sharing stories, photos and memories of parish events—from ministries and outreach to youth group outings—allows members to keep their experience of church alive between and beyond those shared experiences.

Visitors to your site come with a bottom line question about your hospitality: Is this a place I can make my spiritual home? For that reason, the look, feel and access of the site are critical. Visitors should feel welcome to explore, be able to quickly access information about everything from practical questions to spiritual issues, visually find out how your church ministries serve the community and how they might become involved in parish life.

As a current media company's commercials claim: *it's not complicated!* A simple and effective technique is to presume and answer basic questions that visitors might ask. Presenting the information as answered questions is a great way to organize.

Critical for both members and visitors is a website that makes it clear *who* you are and *whose* you are. Beyond the usual, yet important, mission statements, other ways you can communicate those essentials are through pictures of parish events, biographies of key

personnel and blogs by parish staff sharing the Good News. In any case, if you want people to use—and return—to your website, you have to give them a reason to visit and to return often. Frequently changing, highly visual, multi-media content makes all the difference.

A Vision, A Team and A Plan

A great parish website doesn't just happen. It cannot be the task of one person, or depend upon the pastor or staff alone. It takes the community to *be* community. That requires a vision for what the website can be, a team committed to its excellence, and a plan to launch and maintain it long after the initial design.

- ◆ **A Vision.** A pastoral vision for your website will consider the current community context, history, and a host of other critical factors including the issues raised in this article. Without a vision, there will be no way to measure your efforts or make adjustments as circumstances change. What happens when the pastor moves? When a major event occurs in the community? A website needs a vision for operation that is unique and specific to your community. What is important for one church may not be as needed in another parish.
- ◆ **A Team.** A balanced vision comes from considering a variety of perspectives. That takes a team of diversely talented people willing to work together. Leadership is key and may be a person with limited “tech savvy” but simply good leadership skills. Probably the most necessary common trait of each team member is the willingness to be involved on a regular basis and to represent the needs of others. A solid team will be intergenerational and utilize the natural affinity of the youth

and young adults for emerging media to accomplish great things.

- ◆ **A Plan.** As they say, plan the work, and then work the plan. One of the skills needed on website team is good project management that oversees implementation and operation. Without regular maintenance, a website will become static or unable to achieve the vision set for it. Plans need updating too. The website project manager will keep a team on task, on schedule, and online.

Emerging Media, the Gospel and Your Church

Where do you begin or how do you hit the reset button? There are so many daunting challenges: Hardware (servers) and software (content management system) choices, content sources (Do we have to create our own? Is there good stuff out there we can use?), personnel issues (Who in the parish is important to get involved and what sorts of skills are required?), budget issues, data security issues...the list goes on.

The good news is that there are models of effective websites out there. Additionally there are website hosting companies that specifically cater to churches to provide easily accessible

editing tools to build the site as well as provide a secure server home for the site and your parish's content and resources.

What if that last paragraph didn't even make any sense to you, or if you just don't know where to start, or if you've got a site but you want help engaging critical resources in your parish to grow it into a truly sacramental presence?

More good news. There are great educational resources like the *21st Century Faith Formation* resource center from LifelongFaith Associates (www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com) and a developing list of digital content that can be accessed for effectiveness.

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Why Church Leaders Must Be Tech Visionaries

Chris Yaw

Digital learning is the most important innovation in education since the printing press.

Rafael Rief, President, MIT

Educators everywhere know, or suspect, that a tsunami of change is underway in the ways teachers teach and students learn. This is something churches, which are historic bastions of learning, need to better understand and evaluate as we move further into our missions of shaping followers of Christ. This is not some new fad that we should file away and visit later. This is an important development that, when thoroughly evaluated and considered, should be having an affect on what we are doing right now to form disciples.

We are currently seeing two major shifts in this area, says Jose Ferria, CEO of [Knewton](#), an internet education company. The first is the shift to digital materials for use in blended learning environments to augment or even replace written textbooks. Yes, textbooks may soon be obsolete. This school district in Raleigh, West Virginia, joined an increasing number of others and began phasing out all its textbooks. Instead, students use iPads. Within five years, there will be no textbooks in that district at all—everything will be digital.

The second shift, is the move toward making a purely online experience a part of every student's educational experience. There are an increasing number of for-credit courses available purely online. In September Chicago Theological Seminary (UCC) became the first progressive seminary in the U.S. to offer a Masters of Divinity degree totally online. Their slogan, 'You don't have to come here to go here.' The incredible popularity (alongside its guarded effectiveness) of MOOCs—Massive Open Online Courses—attests to this, as does the growing number of free, archived courses at Kahn Academy and other places. The students, not just of tomorrow, but of today, are being formed in a radically new environment.

The reasons are simple, and include more than these four: access to talented instructors, convenience, affordability, and the conclusive research that has found people, in many

Chris Yaw is the founder of ChurchNext, a pastor, and author, who started ChurchNext to help make disciples in his faith community. He serves a congregation in Michigan.

ChurchNext (www.churchnext.tv) creates online Christian learning experiences to invigorate lives and congregations. Along with our partner, Forward Movement, they are devoted to helping people grow in their Christian faith, improve their lives, and better the world.

replicable environments, actually learn more (and better) taking an online class than they do in a face to face environment.

If these developments have your mind spinning, you are not alone. Making sense of how our churches respond is making for a rather elastic environment, filled with innovation and fraught with the ensuing missteps. Not the least of which is what the Mayo Clinic says 60% of American adults suffer from: technophobia, especially older folk, who tend to make up most of our churches. This isn't a disease that requires medical attention, but it's an attitude or reaction that produces symptoms of anxiety. Most of us fear one or more of the following when it comes to adapting to new technologies: looking stupid, appearing inadequate, being monitored by Big Brother, losing control, being at the mercy of a machine, relying on something mechanical because it may fail, damaging the machine or the data and losing face-to-face contact. Most of us bumble along using 10-25% of the capabilities of a software program, and 75% of us secretly wonder, 'What is software, anyhow?'

So compounding the rapidly changing educational landscape is our own apprehension toward technology in the first place. Thankfully, there are a lot of people who are doing wonderful things to shed some light upon the path before us. Here are just a few of the growing list of resources that are helpful in for this journey: *Faith Formation 4.0* by Julie Lytle (Church Publishing), *The Social Media Gospel* by Meredith Gould (Liturgical Press), the work of The Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Theological Seminary, the work of Elizabeth Drescher, and online sites such as techcrunch.com and mashable.com are also helpful.

So what's before us is a vast, new, evolving landscape of seemingly limitless possibility in online education that church leaders need to take seriously. I think it is an invitation and a challenge to dream and envision how this new reality can help us become and shape disciples. And it requires us to put our fears in check, be open to what the Spirit's next 'new thing' might be, and engage in the ongoing conversation with new partners who are developing new ways to tell the old story.



ChurchNext Builds Online Faith Formation

ChurchNext provides online learning where individuals and congregations can take dozens of online courses by themselves or in groups. **ChurchNext** is a great resource for Christians who want to deepen their faith and may not want to go to church to learn, however they want to hear from trusted experts and learn at their own pace, on their own time. For churches, **ChurchNext** builds them their own private school and helps them take advantage of the huge opportunities found in online learning in congregations. There are two ways to take **ChurchNext** courses: individuals can sign up for \$10 per course, or \$15/month for unlimited access; congregations can build their own private schools for \$59/month. There are dozens of courses available and a new one is added every week. **ChurchNext** courses are taught by experts from a moderate theological perspective and from a variety of denominational backgrounds. Topics include scripture, congregational life, and everyday questions. Over 200 churches in the U.S. and Canada have established **ChurchNext** schools.

For more information go to www.churchnext.tv.



Expanding the Reach of Faith Formation with Hybrid Networks

Kyle Matthew Oliver

I serve as the “front line” in the consultation services of a small faith formation resource center at a large protestant seminary in the U.S. mid-Atlantic. Every day, I answer emails, phone calls, Facebook messages, and other inquiries about how to better design Christian education programs and other means of nurturing and growing the faith and discipleship of members of congregations large and small in the United States and beyond.

After a few months on the job, some patterns emerged in these requests for help. The one that really tugged at our institutional heartstrings illustrates how new patterns of American religiosity are changing (or should be changing) the tried-and-(no-longer)-true ministry models that churches have been using for decades. Here’s a sketch of how a typical caller describes things:

“I guess I’m calling to ask your help with a few different problems. We have a small Sunday school that is a lot of work to maintain. We have a hard time training and keeping teachers. In many cases, the only people willing to help are the parents of the few kids who show up, and even they are only here one or two Sundays per month. So it’s demoralizing for them and for us. Many of these families come to worship more regularly but say they can’t commit the time for an extended Sunday morning, to say nothing of coming back for youth group in the evening.

The same is true of our adults. Many of them tell us they’re really hungry to learn. They don’t necessarily know the Bible or the faith very well, and they feel inadequate about that but don’t

Kyle Matthew Oliver is the digital missionary and learning lab coordinator in the Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Theological Seminary and Assistant for Pastoral Care at St. Paul’s Parish in Washington, DC. He blogs at <http://vts-cmt.tumblr.com> and tweets at http://twitter.com/vts_cmt. Kyle also serves on the Project Team for the Faith Formation Learning Exchange.

This article is from the Faith Formation Learning Exchange, a service of Vibrant Faith Ministries, (www.FaithFormationLearningExchange.net). Each week a new faith formation article is published online, together with three blog posters from the Project Team. Subscribe online.

know how to fix it. We ask them what kind of weekday morning fellowship or evening class would help, but they tell us they're too busy to commit to that right now. So our Bible studies and small groups tend to consist of the same dozen or so people who come to everything. We're not really reaching anyone outside these small clumps, even though our congregation is growing a bit. What do you think we should do?"

Sound familiar? It did to us, and these repeated calls strengthened our resolve to try to do something about it. But congregational leaders are reluctant to give up on programs that have worked in the past, especially when the replacements are far from certain. We recognized in this situation an opportunity to be led by the Spirit into new territory. We wanted to bring together faith formation practitioners to pilot a model in a diverse sampling of churches. And since we didn't have all the answers ourselves, we knew we were going to have to learn along with the people we serve. Thus was born the Hybrid Faith Formation Network Initiative.

From Programs to Networks, From Weekly Meetings to Hybrid Groups

Once we knew where to look, we realized a huge part of the work had already been done for us. Anyone familiar with the [Faith Formation 2020](#) project or the [21st Century Faith Formation](#) training program has learned about faith formation networks and their potential to support faith learning in the [new social operating system](#). The idea here is to stop offering programs ("show up when and where we tell you and learn what we want you to learn") and start nurturing networks ("get connected with others who want to learn and do so at your own pace and with the church's blessing and support"). For an excellent summary of faith formation networks, check

out the [Summer 2013 issue of the Lifelong Faith Journal](#), which is entirely dedicated to the subject.

The feedback we got from the folks we shared this idea with was that faith formation networks sounded very exciting, but making the transition to this new paradigm was intimidating. So with the help of several congregations who were intrigued by the idea, we proposed what we came to call a hybrid network, combining network theory with classic small group ministry ideas. The "hybrid" comes from "hybrid learning." It's the term used to describe classes that have both an online and in-person component in traditional educational settings.

The process of launching a hybrid network as we imagine it looks something like this:

1. Identify an area of shared interest for learning and growth (e.g., prayer at home) and connect interested individuals or families via a contextually appropriate "hub" (social networking group, shared blog, or email listserv),
2. Gather the group for monthly in-person meetings to build community and introduce important concepts and skills, and
3. In the intervening time, learn "alone together" by trying out leader-provided activities and discussing the experience online (and hopefully discussing other faith-learning joys and challenges along the way).

Step 1 acknowledges the new realities about how most Americans interact with each other ("offline" friendships extend into the online space) and empowers the group to learn according to their interests (a key point in adult learning theory).

Step 2 creates continuity between program- and network-based approaches to learning and preserves the insight that in-person fellowship can never be replaced by online connection (think *supplement* or *extend*, not *replace*).

Step 3 addresses the rampant busyness of learners' lives by easing the travel and scheduling demands of the group and allows facilitators to provide faith activities to learners when they're at home—which is where the most effective faith formation has always taken place anyway.

Networked Learners, Networked Leaders

Some of the power of this initiative was in the gathering of a cohort of faith formation practitioners all involved in planting these communities of learners. To our way of thinking, our center became the site of a process of parallel modeling and action research. At the same time that these parish facilitators were leading hybrid networks in their contexts, they were a part of a network with each other led by myself and Lisa Kimball, the director of our center. This parallel network was not, strictly speaking, a hybrid network (we met entirely online via Google Hangout, since several of our participants were many states away). But the way they connected with and learned from one another was similar to what participants in the congregational networks were experiencing. This allowed the leaders to walk a bit in their people's shoes.

We knew that experience would be helpful for coaching and training purposes. We took as our shared activity the reading of *The Social Media Gospel* by Meredith Gould and *Faith Formation 4.0* by Julie Lytle, two books with a lot to say about using technology for learning and communication in the church. We discussed the comparative merits of different network "hubs" in different contexts for different kinds of learning (fascinating example: a congregation in a community with many national intelligence workers refused to connect via Facebook). We curated potential resources for designing at-home faith activities for the congregational networks. And we shared our joys and frustrations with each other, taking advantage of the wisdom and

experience of the group to identify best practices and potential pitfalls.

What surprised us was the power of the cohort to convince congregational leaders and even some of our participants that a hybrid network was a promising faith formation model to try in the first place. Several of our colleagues reported initial resistance from supervising clergy until they shared that this was an experiment that other congregations were involved in and that staff and faculty at a trusted denominational seminary were helping support it. Other congregations told us that they might consider a project like this once more data is available about its effectiveness. And one participant spoke particularly powerfully about what this network of colleagues meant to him and his ministry practice:

As a rather extreme extrovert and a minimal participant in digital communities, I had an interesting experience yesterday. Fridays are my day off, but in many ways they are a day which I dread. Most Fridays I'm alone. I don't like days without personal meaningful contact. The idea, though, of having some reading to do as part of a group of people and of having comments/conversation to share seemed to positively affect my outlook for the day. This is something I'll be trying to pay attention to as we continue. This HFFNI will be my first serious online relationship.

We summarize some basic demographic information about this initiative in the table below, including a bit about what kind of network each facilitator brought together.

Hybrid Faith Formation Network Initiative Participant Information

| Position | Gender | Lay or Ordained | Context | Network Convened |
|---|--------|-----------------|--|--|
| Minister for families (staff) | Female | Lay | Pastoral-sized suburban parish | Faith at home for families |
| Former leader of Christian education committee and current parish council officer (volunteer) | Male | Lay | Urban parish making transition from pastoral- to program-sized | Spiritual practices for participants in parish fellowship dinners program |
| Faith formation leader (staff) | Female | Lay | Mid-sized, Mid-Atlantic judicatory | Skills for digital faith formation for leaders in parishes |
| Assistant pastor (staff) | Male | Ordained | Corporate-sized suburban parish | Group Bible study for individuals; general online learning program for individuals |
| Minster for youth (staff) | Female | Lay | Program-sized suburban parish | Idea exchange for parish teachers; faith at home for Sunday school parents |
| Assistant pastor (staff) | Male | Ordained | Program-sized suburban parish | Faith at home for families |
| Minister for children and youth (staff) | Female | Lay | Corporate-sized suburban parish | Faith at home for families |

Where To From Here (For Us and For You)?

Needless to say, our center is excited about and grateful for the early successes of this initiative and the way it is renewing faith formation efforts in these different contexts. Many of the hybrid networks have already launched, and our network of leaders have already requested that our group continue to meet informally for ongoing mutual support even after our formal time together has ended.

In future iterations of this initiative, we hope to use the face-to-face web conferencing time more for community building and less for negotiation of logistics. We found that smaller web conference conversations with interest-group clusters were particularly effective in creating a willingness for participants to be

vulnerable and to learn more from each other than from us. (We should have known: that’s the equivalent of splitting into table groups at an in-person meeting—an age-old technique in faith formation ministry.)

A continuing point of reflection for us relates to the hybrid learning from which our networks take their name. What is the difference between a hybrid course and a hybrid network? In both our network and the congregational ones, how do we negotiate and adjust expectations for participants and leaders. Flexibility, beyond that of a traditional online course in a traditional education setting or even a parish class, seems essential. But at what level of flexibility does the network fail to be a community making progress on shared learning objectives? These are just a few of the questions we’ll be asking each other in the coming months.

Just as we hope that the practitioners we've worked with will go on to plant new and different networks (and perhaps even split and multiply existing ones), we too remain open to discerning a variety of ways forward for the Hybrid Faith Formation Network Initiative. These will probably include new cohorts, informal articles and talks for practitioners interested in trying this approach, and more formal action research reporting (see the resource list below for a link to our recent report to the Religious Education Association). If any of this is interesting to you in your faith formation context, please don't hesitate to contact us at cmt@vts.edu.

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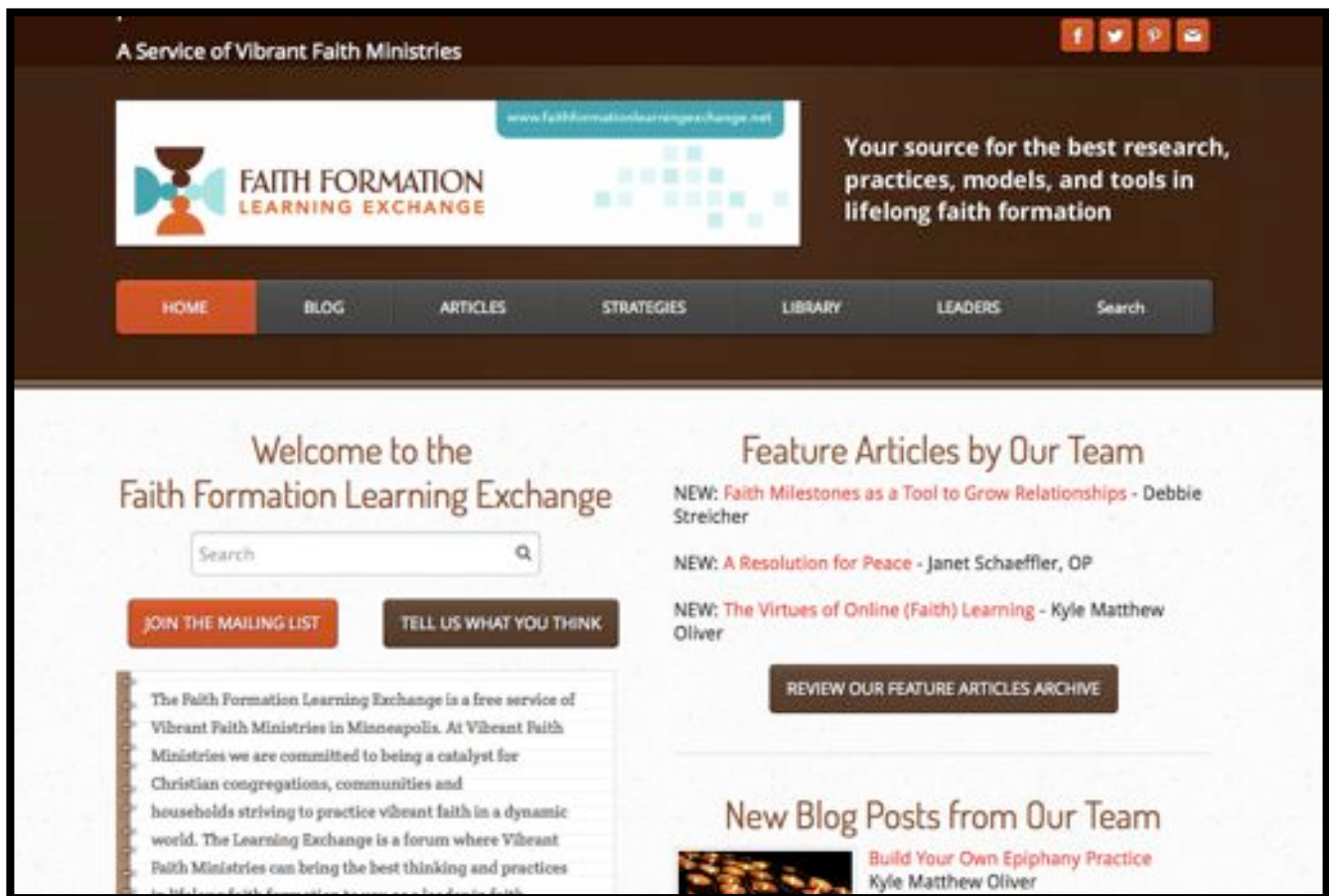
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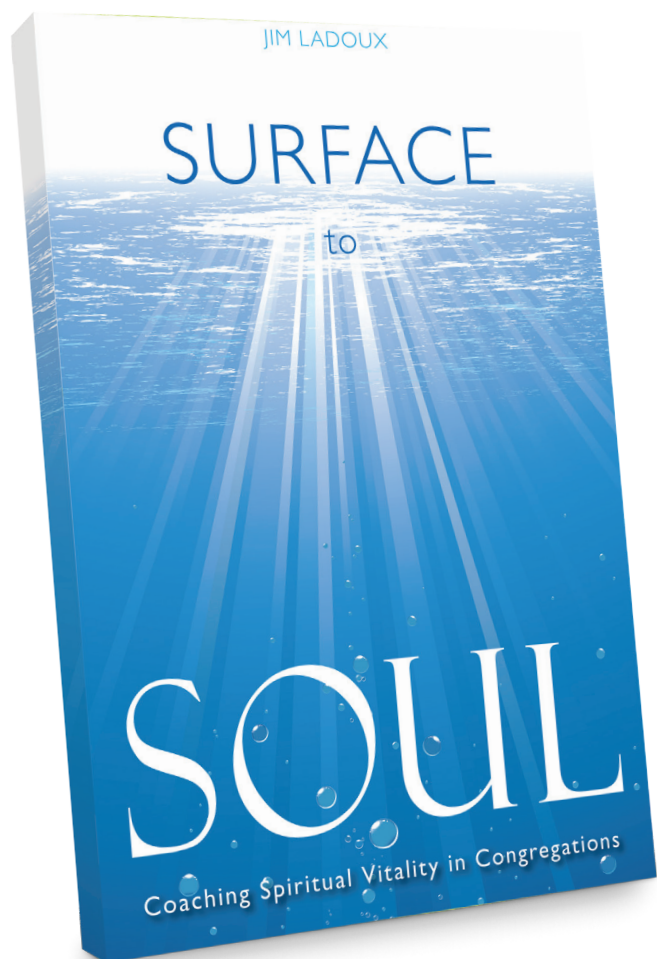
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JIM LADOUX serves as the Director of Coaching & Training at Vibrant Faith Ministries in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has been instrumental in developing their signature coaching process that helps individuals, families, and congregations integrate principles and practices that lead to vibrant faith for all ages.

Jim has served Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist and United Church of Christ congregations for over 20 years, helping them develop strategic plans, equip leaders, launch small group ministries, establish year-round stewardship plans, increase member engagement, and rethink faith formation principles and practices. In partnership with Wartburg Theological Seminary, Jim oversees Vibrant Faith Ministries' Youth & Family Certification Schools that are held throughout the United States.

Jim lives in Burnsville, Minnesota, has been married for 22 years and enjoys being a parent of two young boys. He and his family enjoy travel, camping, swimming and board games. They are members of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church.





Jesus's Prophetic Reach: Drawing Children to the Center of Congregational Life

Tim Coltvet

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.
(Luke 2:41-52)

Jesus broke with the expectations of his day by inviting children into his ministry and mission—indeed, into the kingdom of God. Churches today must do the same, celebrating and including children rather than relegating them to the fringes of their worship.

Tim Coltvet is the Coordinator of Contextual Learning and Coaching for the Children, Youth, and Family Ministry Master's degree at Luther Seminary and an adjunct instructor in Luther Seminary's MA Program in Children, Youth, and Family. He is a pastor who loves his call to walk alongside students as they are learning in context. He has served at two vibrant ELCA parishes in the Twin Cities and currently enjoys helping congregations shape their Children, Youth, and Family Ministries.

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God's Prophetic Reach in Luke: Stories of Being Lost and Found

Luke's overarching theme of "lost and found" (prodigal son, lost coin, lost sheep) makes it fitting that the boy Jesus should lead the twenty-first-century reader in reflecting on the place and state of today's children and youth and the opportunity for the church to draw them into the mission of God.

"So, how are the children?" the rhetorical bumper sticker reads. If we watch the evening news, our daily paper, and blogs, we may come to this conclusion: "Not so well!" Childhood is by nature a vulnerable time of physical, mental, and emotional development. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that children continue to suffer at the hands of more powerful and often unreliable adults. Stories of kids and guns, child labor, and sex trafficking continue to baffle us as we read the daily headlines. We mourn the fact that "lost" is an understatement for the lives of millions of children on this planet, those born into situations of hunger and oppression, lack of proper care, and scenarios of negligence. In developed countries such as North America, where kids appear to be faring well (or at least better), we see children and youth being lost in their own way: lost in the shuffle of busy schedules and the constant press of time; lost in the digital emergence, an avalanche of information that is sometimes a gift and sometimes a liability;¹ lost to their tired and worn-out parent(s), who may be facing some of the greatest economic challenges of their lifetime, and trying to find quality time with their kids in the meanwhile. In this essay I invite readers to allow the "prophetic reach" of this twelve-year-old boy to draw them into a larger story that reclaims the place and state of children and youth in the life of the congregation and, more broadly, in the reign and kingdom of God.

Jesus Gets "Lost"

In the well-known story of Jesus in the temple, we see one of the last glimpses into the life of Jesus the boy, who would one day be recognized as the crucified and risen Son of God. On the one hand, it is a text that terrifies us as parents. Who of us has not temporarily lost a child at the supermarket, or perhaps have been the lost child ourselves once upon a time? It is also a story that brings a sigh of relief and an emphatic "Of course!" when Jesus is spotted at the temple, listening to, questioning, and teaching matters of faith with the religious teachers of the day. As we engage this text in today's context, I would like to offer some key markers or questions to help us see the urgency and need to think critically about drawing young people, particularly children and youth, into the center of our worship gatherings—not only as recipients of godly teaching but also as teachers themselves and stewards of God's grace and mercy: equal partners and servants in the *missio dei*.

Jesus is "Found"

Of course Jesus is at the center of the temple! In one of the earliest moments foreshadowing his impending glory, we find young Jesus holding court with the religious teachers of the day. Somehow, in his divine orientation, he is not lost, but rather found, found where he "must" be, in his Father's house. He is so much at home, in fact, that he (Jesus) seems to have lost track of his parents with no apparent concern for where they are!

I recently stumbled upon an old video production of this biblical account shown on a religious television network. Done in the genre and era of Charlton Heston's *Ten Commandments*, Joseph and Mary are costumed for the part and clearly navigating their way around Hollywood-like sets of ancient Jerusalem. The video goes to great lengths to build a plotline around Joseph and Mary's tireless search for the young Jesus.

Taking dramatic license was no problem for this video production crew as they embellished the story line of Mary and Joseph's search by following them through the streets of Jerusalem. They hear a rumor of his being seen with another young boy near the temple, whom Jesus is apparently teaching and with whom he is staying. But when Mary and Joseph arrive at the house, they come up empty-handed. The final blow comes when Joseph and Mary are apprehended by two Roman guards late at night who charge them with breaking curfew. Pleading before the Roman authorities, they are pardoned with a slap on the wrist while being reminded that there are "kid snatchers" out there (clearly appealing to modern-day parenting guilt). Finally, they are compelled to check the temple, and they are greeted by a man who assures them that Jesus can be found inside.

Now, do you remember reading these two large embellishments of the text? I don't either. This television episode, like so many other productions, tried to do what the text does not do—add details to an already interesting account. The text tells us only that Jesus' response to his parents when they did find him is "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49-50). This simple question marks Jesus' first recorded words recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The verse is foundational as it relates to the incarnation story from verses prior and gives an indication of Jesus' future all in the form of a question—a question that will point us to deeper meaning and truth.

Of course, Jesus is at the center of the room! He is the Son of God, we think to ourselves. And moreover, he is a Jewish boy. Boys like Jesus were likely socialized in their early years by a mentoring and apprenticing culture that would instruct them in the Torah and verse them in the cadences and rhythms of faith. The temple, therefore, was likely Jesus' home away from home. More, Jesus speaks of this place as central to his identity and his very constitution as a human being. God made flesh was at home.

Children and Youth in the Center of Our Congregations: Will We Welcome Them

Kendra Creasy Dean thoughtfully draws on Anna Carter Florence,² who reminds us of yet another gathering of religious adults with a young person. Only in this story, the young person is not in the center of the room but is sitting rather far off in the back window. In Acts 20:7-13, we hear of the young man named Eutychus, who falls asleep during the Apostle Paul's sermon and falls three stories to his death (eventually, Paul has a hand in reviving him).

Florence calls this a "text of terror." The terror is not so much Paul's preaching methods, but more so the relegation of Eutychus to the back of the room. As Dean expounds on this text for our modern-day context, she aptly points out that far too many congregations have done this today in a figurative way, that is, relegating children and youth to the fringes of our worship life. When we start asking questions like, "Where are the youth?" it is far too late. As an illustration of this disturbing reality, Luther Seminary Professor Roland Martinson frequently shares a parable entitled "Peter and Penny Go Swimming." In this parable, Peter and Penny are regularly taken by their parents, both enthusiastic swimmers, to the swimming pool in hopes they too will take to swimming. Early on, the young children are consigned to a little room beside the pool, because they might cry and "disturb the adult swimmers." Besides, they are "too young to understand." By age three, they are told stories about swimming and color pictures of people swimming. Eventually, they are allowed to splash around in the wading pool and take classes to learn more about swimming. The story continues,

By the time Penny and Peter were thirteen, they had studied the Swimmer's Manual in even more detail and had learned the rules of the swimming pool off by heart....They

had studied great swimmers of the past, including Olympic medal winners. They had heard about Canadian swimmers who went to other countries such as Africa or India to teach swimming, and they had seen slides of groups of African or Indian swimmers standing beside their swimming pools....At last Penny and Peter finished swimming school and were allowed to accompany their parents into the swimming pool every week. They tried it a few times. Much to the disappointment of their parents, Peter and Penny had lost interest and preferred to watch television instead.³

Sitting on the fringes, being a spectator at best, Eutychus becomes what many of our modern-day congregants are now seeing as “Peters” and “Pennys.” While in kiddie pools, wave pools, and splashing in the shallow waters, sadly Peter and Penny never realized the rush of plunging into the deep, churning waters, holding the deeper wonder and mysteries of God. None of the rich and robust questions of faith will be asked by Peter, Penny, or Eutychus as they have been socialized to the margins of congregational life. And so, with this in mind, we make a shift now, from the twelve-year-old boy standing at the center of the temple to the God-made-flesh on the move far beyond the temple walls. Fueled by the *missio dei*, we now see our first glimpses of Jesus’ prophetic reach for children and youth.

Jesus’ Prophetic Reach

Later in Luke, Jesus expresses prophetic words about children through a kairotic teaching moment that beckons children forward, not to the center of the temple this time, but even more expansively to the center of God’s kingdom. Eutychus, Peter, and Penny would have a much different experience in the church that is envisioned here:

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the

disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (18:15–17)

This pronouncement alone should be a wake-up call to us as stewards of public worship gatherings that usher in the radical hospitality of “God with us.” As we reflect on Jesus’ prophetic reach to include children in a world that was radically inhospitable towards them, we are urged to think about the congregational climate or environments we create. A good start might be to listen closely to the practices of others in our midst. Consider, for example, the efforts of Edina Community Lutheran Church in Edina, Minnesota. Pastors Eric Strand and Pam Fickenscher have made great strides in their worship gatherings by ensuring all children that they are more than welcome to wiggle and squirm in their pews on Sunday morning. In their pew racks is a message for young families that serves also as a reminder to all adults that we take part in Jesus’ radical welcoming of the youngest among us by acknowledging their presence and encouraging their participation. The card reads:

ABCs for Adults Worshipping with (and near) Children

- ◆ **Arrive** in time to find a good place to sit. Children are short and appreciate being able to see. We encourage you to sit up front or near the musicians to allow this.
- ◆ **Bring** something quiet to occupy them in restless moments. “Busy” bags and books are available for children in the narthex.
- ◆ **Calm** them with hugs, sitting in your lap, and backrubs.
- ◆ **Demonstrate** how to sing familiar refrains, fold hands in prayer, stand for the gospel and prayers, and recite familiar parts of the service, such as the Lord’s Prayer.
- ◆ **Express** joy at having children worship with you. Smile at them and their parents. Dance with them when the music is lively.
- ◆ **Free** yourself of the expectation to be perfect. None of us would be here if we were!
- ◆ **Give** your child something to put in the offering, and encourage them to give from their own funds as they grow older.
- ◆ **Help** parents of small children.
- ◆ **Invite** children to sit with you so that you may assist with bottles, dropped= toys, and teaching kids how to worship.
- ◆ If you have trouble hearing or concentrating because children near you are noisy, feel free to move to a quieter area.

The Children’s Sermon— Welcome to the Center of the Room

“Sermon on the Steps” or “Spark Moment” or “Children’s Sermon”—whatever you want to call it, it is one thing to gather the children up front as a comedic break or to be “cute,” and it is quite another to gather children up front with an authentic, sometimes playful, sometimes serious message of proclamation and peace that is well prepared for their hearing. By “well prepared,” I mean hours of reflection, not minutes before worship begins. Preachers are sometimes advised to spend about an hour of study and writing for every minute preached or to ask the =convicting question, “Did Jesus need to die in order for me to preach this message?” The preacher’s task is never taken lightly and neither should be the preparation for the children’s sermon.

For years, I have been a strong proponent of children’s sermons in the context of cross-generational worship, and I continue to be. Granted, I have cringed along with the rest of you when a children’s sermon collapses into convenient little moralistic takeaways or messages that simply don’t reflect the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

I once brought a busload of high school students to a church en route to a mission experience in western Montana. Along the way, we worshiped in a church where the church president was leading a children’s sermon and highlighting the power of sin in our lives. In a very unprepared and naïve manner, he invited kids to raise their hands if they had sinned that past week and invited them to share. Even our high school kids began sinking in their seats as they felt the weight of the world resting on the children up front. Sadly, it was an elder child in the group who was called out and highlighted as the example. Not even ready with caring and compassionate words such as, “Jimmy, the good news today is that God wipes the slate clean and loves you and forgives you,” the

leader let the didactic moment fall apart. As a last ditch attempt at communicating the gospel authentically, several of our teens sought out the boy after worship, affirming him and reminding him that God loves him. Later on, as our journey continued, the teens discussed how the boy was “set up” during the children’s sermon, noting that, in their opinions, the experience was not reflective of Jesus’ ministry and mission.

My own seminary homiletics professors once squared off on children’s sermons in a *Word & World* Face to Face column. Michael Rogness gave a short and succinct argument in support of such sermons. He briefly highlighted the following points:

1. They give children a “place” in the worship service.
2. They are a different kind of communication which does work with children.
3. In their different form, they also communicate to the whole congregation.⁴

Although the late Professor Sheldon Tostengard raised a word of caution with regard to diving into children’s sermons too hastily (with possible ulterior motives of adding the “cute” factor), he also asserted that we should reclaim the art of telling Bible stories during the time allocated as “Children’s Sermon.” This sounds quite refreshing and appropriate for an increasingly biblically illiterate culture in 2013:

A Bible story well told could be a fine, if occasional, addition to our worship services.

The trick is to tell the Bible story well, with brevity, clarity, and the right addition of meaningless detail. Some have gifts for that kind of telling, and some do not; but even if it is not the pastor, someone in the congregation can surely tell such stories with energy and verve.⁵

In keeping with Tostengard’s suggestion, Mount Calvary Lutheran in Excelsior, Minnesota, believes that telling Bible stories is the best curriculum for any children’s sermon in worship. Not only does it serve the children well, it also is an introduction for adults who may have distanced themselves from the practice of knowing and rehearsing the biblical story—or perhaps they have never have been exposed to biblical stories in the first place.

Our worship needs the presence of children—not because the church is aging or dwindling or losing its gusto, and not because the children are our only hope for survival. Rather, we need children in worship because that shows that we are following the prophetic reach of Jesus Christ. When we view Jesus’ life and ministry, his signal to us regarding children and youth is to include them, to celebrate them, and to draw them into the center of the room.

The alternative will undoubtedly become a self-fulfilling prophecy of gloom and doom—Eutychuses, Peters, and Pennys who ultimately find their way to the fringes and sadly fall away from the church. With the *missio dei* as our guide, we are called to embody the radical hospitality of Jesus, inviting children and youth to the center of our life together in our preaching, our teaching, our serving, and our very being as a cross-generational church. The late Peter Benson of Search Institute once stated that the church is one of the few institutions in society where up to five generations of people are encouraged to gather together under one roof. This statement alone will cause any church—large or small, rural or suburban, house church or cathedral—to recognize the contextual beauty of two or three gathering in Christ’s name.

We gather as church with these “lost and found” Lukan narratives in mind: Jesus, the boy, mingling with teachers and mentors of the day in a temple that welcomes youthful presence, questions, and insights. And Jesus, the man on a mission, breaking down barriers between young and old. Faithful to these stories, we can extend Jesus’ prophetic reach—

for Eutychus, for Peter, for Penny, for your children and mine.

End Notes

- ¹ A 2010 survey found that 8–18-year-olds spend 7 hours and 38 minutes per day or 53 hours per week using entertainment media, according to Drew Altman, President and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation. He states, “When children are spending this much time doing anything, we need to understand how it’s affecting them—for good and bad.” See “Daily Media Use Among Children and Teens Up Dramatically From Five Years Ago,” Kaiser Family Foundation, at <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia012010nr.cfm> (accessed April 21, 2013).
- ² Anna Carter Florence presents a compelling argument for how and why our current congregational life suffers from the marginalizing of children and youth in

corporate worship. Florence says, “We have separated preaching and youth, both literally and figuratively, in the church and in the academy. We have separated them into distinct ministries, and then we have not talked about it, so that our silence perpetuates the problem and maintains a mute, marginal caste of Christians in our own churches.” See *OMG: A Youth Ministry Handbook*, ed. Kendra Creasy Dean (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010) 44–47.

- ³ Janet Metcalfe, “Peter and Penny Go Swimming,” *Presbyterian Record*, vol. 122 (May 1998). For the full text of the parable, see <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Peter+and+Penny+go+swimming%3A+a+parable.-a030178746> (accessed May 21, 2013).
- ⁴ Michael Rogness, “Children’s Sermons? Yes!” *Word & World* 10/1 (1990) 57.
- ⁵ Sheldon Tostengard, “Children’s Sermons? No!” *Word & World* 10/1 (1990) 58.



Faith Formation in the Small Congregation

Susan Strouse

*How do we pass faith on to our children today? No curriculum can provide it all.
We must be intentional, inclusive and inter-generational.*

How do we pass faith on to our children? The answer used to be easy: Sunday school, Vacation Bible School (VBS), Confirmation classes, Bible memorization, Davey & Goliath videos (I know, I'm dating myself). But those days are gone, or at least changing. In all three congregations I've served, this has been one of the biggest challenges. Everyone agrees Christian education is a top priority, but questions abound about how to do it.

I should note that all my congregations have been small. However, I believe the small church is the "canary in the coalmine." The issues we face will eventually impact every congregation. But publishers have been behind the curve in that most curricula is designed for bigger churches, with lessons divided into age groups, assuming a group of children and a teacher in each class. I laugh every time I read, "Divide the class into small groups." Our *congregation* is a small group!

Another challenge is that we're progressive. At almost every "progressive Christian" seminar, someone asks, "What resources do you recommend for children?" In almost every case, the response is, "I don't know; that's not my area of expertise." Although Marcus Borg once added this advice: "Don't teach them anything they'll have to unlearn."

Susan Strouse is a pastor of First United Lutheran Church in San Francisco since 2004, and has served as the Dean of the San Francisco Conference of the Sierra Pacific Synod (ELCA) since 2010. She holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. Her area of study and interest is interfaith theology, particularly working with congregations and clergy to explore the meaning of being a Christian in our religiously diverse world. She served as the Interim Executive Director of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio from 2011-2012.

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I did pick up a flyer for *Seasons of the Spirit* from Wood Lake Publishing Inc. at a conference, and we've used that for many years now. It's lectionary-based, which allows us to connect the children's lesson with what is read in the worship service. It's the closest we've ever come to my dream curriculum of a multi-generational toolbox, which provides a variety of material to be chosen and used by our (by necessity) very flexible teachers.

But a good curriculum isn't enough. We have also discovered that what is absolutely crucial is creativity, innovation, and flexibility on the part of parents, teachers, worship planners, pastor, and congregation. For example, even though I never thought I'd agree to Sunday school during worship, for quite a while we dismissed the kids after the Prayer of the Day for Kids' Time. I began each worship service with a conversation time with the children—not a children's sermon, but a brief introduction to the scripture passage they'd be learning. It was a time for me to connect with the kids even though I wasn't their teacher. They would return in time for Communion.

Because Kids' Time wasn't very long, we added a two-hour Second Sunday School program, which gave us the opportunity to go into more depth with a lesson or theme. We've used the time for some intergenerational classes as well.

Now that our little group of children is getting older, we've discontinued Kids' Time (although the arrival of two-year-old twins has caused us to put on our thinking caps once again) and they stay with their parents in worship. I now invite them to take turns bringing an object for me to spontaneously create a message during the service. Even though it isn't supposed to be "Stump the Pastor," they delight in bringing things they think can't possibly have anything to do with church (so far, I haven't been stumped). I find these to be invaluable relationship building moments.

Speaking of relationship building, an often-neglected element is the inclusion of kids in the planning process. They have valuable insights and ideas, and need to be assured that

their voices are important and welcome. They also need to hear the message that it's okay to ask questions and that we really mean it. They can come up with some doozies, but we should all be prepared for every moment to be a teaching moment.

Another important component is the inclusion of kids in worship leadership in age-appropriate ways. It is a joy to watch them grow into their roles as lectors, cantors, intercessors, musicians, and Communion assistants. Much more than just creating an assigned acolyte schedule, we allow them to develop their own sense of giftedness and calling within the church.

Finally, I am convinced that the most important component of the spiritual development of children is their interaction with adults who are willing to share their stories, questions, and journeys of faith. Of course, this means that there must be an ongoing program of adult development, too. Congregational service projects are also good, not simply as activities, but as opportunities to connect their faith with life in the world with adults who in reality are their spiritual mentors.

How do we pass faith on to our children today? The times in which we live call for creativity and imagination. No curriculum can provide it all. We must be intentional, inclusive, and intergenerational. And we must remember that we adults, with wisdom to impart, can be the best resources of all.

Pass it on!



Less Talk, More Action

Mark Yaconelli

In my town, children and youth are looking for people with mischief in their eyes, people willing to say “yes” to the active pursuit of love.

So much of religious education is abstract—stories, beliefs, ideas about how life works. Meanwhile youth long for experience. They long to *do* something. If we could listen to the restless yearning hidden within the hearts of the young, we might hear something like, “No more talk of love. No more tales of suffering. No more cautionary fables. Give me someone to kiss. Give me a road to walk. Give me ashes to grieve. Help me make my own regrets.” This kind of raw desire is troubling to parents and manipulated by advertisers, and yet it’s exactly this honest ache for life and relationship that Christian communities should cultivate and address.

What my children want from religious communities are opportunities for the direct exploration of real living. They don’t want to talk about God, they want to live God. They don’t want to hear about great deeds, they want to be asked to do great deeds. For religious communities to aid the spiritual growth of young people in the future, they need to find ways to encourage, bless, train, and support young people in the active pursuit of real life. It is in that pursuit that God is discovered.

The youth of this age carry the same hurt and prayer and visions and spiritual ache that all of us harbored when we were young. They long to fall in love. They long to discover and pursue

Mark Yaconelli is a writer, speaker, retreat leader, spiritual director, community activist, youth worker, storyteller, disco dancer, husband, and father. He is the co-founder and program director for the **Compassionate Claremont School of Theology**, which seeks to heal broken people and communities through contemplation, creativity, and compassion. Mark spent twenty years working with young people and the people who serve them in congregational, camp, and conference settings. He is the author of *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (2006 Youth Specialties), *Growing Souls* (2007 Zondervan), *Downtime* (Zondervan 2008), and *Wonder, Fear, and Longing*. Visit his website: <http://www.markyaconelli.com>.

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and develop their own gifts. They long to be overcome by the Great Mystery we call “God.” They long to be seen and known, accepted and celebrated by people with warm hearts. Although the culture shifts and technologies invade, the desires of children and youth remain the same.

The challenge for me, and the struggle for those called to tend the spiritual essence of children and adolescents, is to remember what we know—remember what is needed. Young people are looking for living people who take the soul’s desires seriously. They are looking for people who care about what matters; people struggling to pursue loving relationships (with God, others, enemies, self); people willing to struggle for freedom and healing; people willing to risk new forms of living that resist the frantic, isolating, and violent culture that surrounds us.

In my town children and youth are looking for people with mischief in their eyes, people willing to say “yes” to the active pursuit of love. Four examples of what this might look like from my own town, none of which were initiated by local youth ministries:

- ◆ Overwhelmed with worry and sadness following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a group of local adults invited eight Haitian middle and high school students (as well as other interested students) to spend a weekend exploring a Christian approach to suffering. Thirty students signed up. For two days we experimented with various practices that heal suffering (silence, prayer, singing, art, storytelling, solitude). The final night the kids held a prayer vigil that lasted into the wee hours of the morning.
- ◆ For over twenty years two members from my church have volunteered with [Witness for Peace](#), accompanying families and communities in Nicaragua and Honduras who face persecution. On one trip they invited youth and families with children to join them.

Two youth from our community and three families participated. These trips continue.

- ◆ Upset by the loss of salmon in our local rivers, a college woman in town began an art project to raise awareness and funds to help the salmon. A church member invited this young woman to speak about her project in worship. At the end of her presentation the speaker invited the children and youth of the church to help her create the public art protest. Twenty teens and children signed up and the church created youth and children classes to help prepare them understand and prepare for the event.
- ◆ A former theater teacher in our church asked a local teenage girl if she might write a play for a church Christmas pageant. She did and the teacher helped her put it on. On the night of auditions, a woman in our church brought in a young teenage boy whom she had heard singing around her neighborhood. The boy became the primary singer in the play. The show (with a hard hitting message on the suffering of military families) was a hit and the boy now sings regularly at church and community events.

What real activities can churches and religious teachers do with youth and children? How can we help the children and youth of our town live out the faith first, and then learn the theology and beliefs second? It begins with people listening to the yearnings and needs of the young and then prayerfully, imaginatively, and even courageously responding.



Why Children Need Ignatian Spirituality

Tim and Sue Muldoon

To the extent that we offer our children ways of imagining God always present among us in our families, we help them to understand that everyday life is shot through with grace.

What do you want to be when you grow up?” That’s the question that many adults ask children to get a sense of how they see themselves. Will she be a doctor? Is he interested in sports? Does she like to build things? Does he like math? Perhaps lurking behind the question is a more practical interest: will this child be motivated to do schoolwork? In any case, what is happening is as natural as telling stories to children: we are asking them to take a look around their imagination.

This natural-as-can-be technique is at the heart of a spiritual practice that developed in different ways in the Christian tradition, but achieved clarity in the writings and legacy of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. His basic insight was to recognize that God worked on his own imagination before he even realized it, and that his own religious conversion was the recognition that he found greater peace, more profound love, and a sense of meaning and purpose when he embraced where God had been moving in his imagination. To put it most briefly, he discovered—only after an injury gave him a period of convalescence that forced him to be silent for a while—that God incited him to imagine service of others rather than ego-building, and that he would gain great joy from living out what he had imagined.

Children can learn much from being invited into the kind of spiritual practices that had such an influence on Ignatius. When parents or other adults invite children to use their imagination, they are not only *stimulating their cognitive capacities*; they are also giving their children a way of contrasting various possibilities for their lives. What desires, hopes, or fears emerge in their imagination? How do they relate to other children, adults, or fantasy figures, and how do those relationships impact the way they interact with real people?

Tim and Sue Muldoon are the authors of *Six Sacred Rules for Families* (Ave Maria Press, 2013). Tim is a theologian and author of several books who teaches at Boston College and writes frequently for Patheos. Sue is a therapist and religious educator.

This article appeared as part of the “Passing on the Faith: Teaching the Next Generation” Symposium on Patheos.com: www.patheos.com/Topics/Passing-on-the-Faith.html. Read all of the articles online.

When adults encourage children to use their imagination in prayer, they help their children understand the way God is already active in their lives. “How did Jesus treat his friends when he was a child?” “How do you think God feels when we do that?” “What would Jesus do?” Parents can do what Jesus himself did. It is telling that Jesus himself invited his listeners to imagine the kingdom of God using stories and images: a **mustard seed**; a pearl of great price; a **runaway son**; a woman looking for a coin; and many others. Imagination is a way that a person young or old can explore possibilities beyond the ordinary, and begin to see the world through God’s eyes.

In our book *Six Sacred Rules for Families*, we explore the way that the insights of Ignatius might be applied to raising children. Most important is the practice of offering children the idea that “the kingdom of God is among you”—that is, unfolding every day at home. To the extent that we offer our children ways of imagining God always present among us in our families, we help them to understand that everyday life is shot through with grace, and that all the ups and downs of family life are part of a shared pilgrimage. Giving our children a sense of the direction in their lives will, we hope, give them a sense that every experience, good or bad, can be part of moving them toward joy.

Most important is to model unreserved love, for our example becomes the bedrock upon which they can imagine a loving God. Showing affection, spending time together in games or tasks, or staying with our children when they experience fear or heartache—these are some of the ways that we point them toward God’s unconditional love for them. To use a gospel metaphor, providing such examples is like cultivating the soil of their lives so that the seed of God’s word might more easily take root.

With Ignatius, we believe that God deals directly with each creature. We cannot make them followers of Christ; only the Holy Spirit can. But we can help remove the obstacles to their faith by helping them understand love,

and by helping them to imagine the way God is laboring in the world—in our family, and in their own hearts—to build his kingdom of mercy, love, and justice. Our hope is that in cultivating an imagination of God as the direction of everything loving, everything good, and everything hopeful, we will encourage them, when they are ready, to listen to his voice, summoning them to the goodness for which he has created them.

Part Two

Children need Ignatian spirituality because it can help them learn the value of slowing down to take stock of what their lives mean.

“What did you do at school today?” This and similar questions we ask our children in order to learn about their experiences points to a second technique that is at the heart of the Ignatian spiritual tradition. In **Part 1** of this series, we focused on using imagination as a springboard for cultivating our children’s spiritual lives. Here, we’ll focus on reviewing the average day as another technique for filling out our children’s spiritual vocabulary.

Why is it that dinner conversations frequently involve talking to our loved ones about what happened during the day? What is it about talking about past experiences that helps us form bonds of relationships? On some level all of us intuit a basic point: there is something about memory that is distinctive about the way we make sense of the world.

As parents, we have the power to help our children use memory to consider the meaning of their experiences, both good and bad. Consider the following questions, which you might use over dinner or (as we sometimes do) before bedtime.

- ◆ *What was something that made you happy today?*
- ◆ *What was something that made you feel sad?*
- ◆ *What are you looking forward to tomorrow?*

These three simple questions can be a springboard for follow-up conversation: “Let’s thank God for what made us happy; ask God to help us with what made us sad; and ask him to be with us tomorrow.” And so on.

Saint Ignatius understood that memory serves to orient ourselves to the world, and that a true conversion also involves a transformation of the ways we remember our lives. He hinted at the vital role of memory in his *Suscipe*:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.

Of course there are different age-appropriate ways to encourage the practice of using memory in prayer. We’ve illustrated above a way that is appropriate for young children, but for older kids and teens one might instead converse naturally, asking (for example) where they found God over the course of the day. The *Picturing God* blog offers a number of examples, and many of the contributors point to an Ignatian practice of the Examen as helpful.

The *Examen* is the daily practice of prayerfully using memory. It helps a person become adept at finding God in all things, and bears fruit in finding God both in the past and in the present moment. It involves speaking to God as one friend speaks to another, then walking with God through the experiences of the past day—rummaging, to use a phrase from Dennis Hamm, SJ—to find what God wants to show us about our lives, our desires, and our decisions.

Children need Ignatian spirituality because it can help them learn the value of slowing down to take stock of what their lives mean. Many children today lead heavily programmed lives, limiting the time to develop creativity and independent thinking. It is good to teach them our language about God using traditional language-based methods (reading

the Bible, learning our customs and beliefs, and so on)—but we suggest that it is also important to supplement those methods with encouraging exploration, reflection, and prayer. Every child learns differently and resonates with different ways of exploring the world. Encouraging your children to explore spirituality in this way may resonate with some children who less likely to sit down and read a Bible story. To the extent that we can encourage children to connect the word “God” with their very own concrete life experiences, we offer them an entry point into an expansive shared pilgrimage of faith.

Cultivating our children’s memory also sets the stage for what is central—though often implicit—in Christian spirituality: namely, the shared memory of Jesus. Christian faith is rooted in memory, not philosophical abstraction: Jesus was a person who did and said specific things. If children become fluent in the language of memory, then they are likely to understand the significance of written memory in the scriptures. “Luke remembered Jesus this way.” “John remembered Jesus this way.” What emerges is a collection of memories that help shape the ways that we remember Jesus in practices such as the Eucharist.

In Part Three, we’ll return to this theme of memory by focusing on the stories that we tell children about Jesus: not only what they say, but how we might share them and invite children to be part of them.

Part Three

We need to help children encounter Jesus by using their senses in hearing stories about him.

Some of our favorite memories of childhood, and of times with our own children, have been during the Christmas season. If your families are anything like ours, you understand how all our senses light up: the smell of baking cookies and of pine from the Christmas tree; the sights of snowfall, Christmas lights, and wrapped gifts; the sounds of carols and the

laughter of cousins playing together; the taste of Christmas dinner with family, of cookies and pies and a hundred other handmade treats; the warmth of a fire, the hugs of far-flung relatives, even the flannel of pajamas on Christmas morning. Our senses make our memories.

So too in prayer. Saint Ignatius intuited this important point in his counsel to **apply all our senses in prayer**: to see, hear, smell, feel, and touch what is going on around us when we enter into the rich stories about Jesus' life and teachings. In Part Three we'll focus on helping children encounter Jesus by using their senses in hearing stories about him.

Christmas is the obvious example, because it is the most sensory season. It was **Saint Francis of Assisi** who originated the idea of the crèche, in order that people might more easily come to understand the story of God becoming one of us in the baby Jesus. (Francis was Ignatius' prime example of how to live a Christian life, **much like the present pope**.)

But what is true of Christmas is no less true of the rest of the Church year, or of Christian faith in general: children learn it by sensing it. From the early centuries when Christians could crawl out of the catacombs to celebrate the sacred liturgy, Christian worship has been sensual. Consider hymns, incense, chant, and the **development of Western music**. Think of European art, so wedded to biblical stories, the saints, and liturgy. Meditate on the way that college campuses even today draw from the Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages, drawing the heart heavenward by pointing the eye skyward, and by telling stories by painting them in sunlight-drenched stained glass. Think of bread and wine, water and oil in the sacramental celebrations.

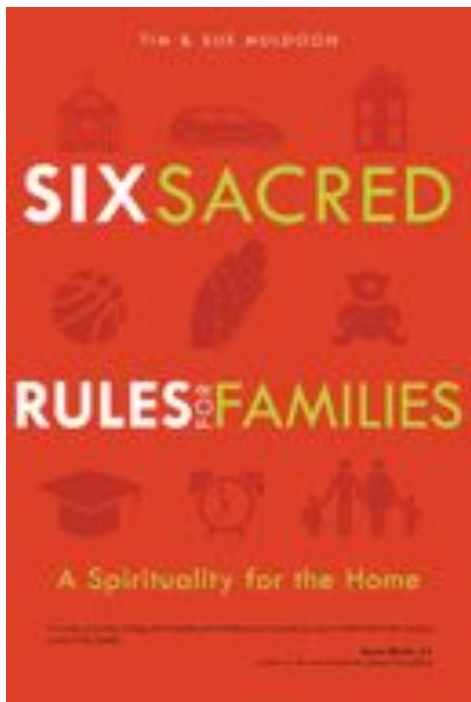
Sharing faith with children means sharing with them this kind of sensual world: that is, telling stories not only with grown-up sounding words like "commandment" or "sacrament," but also with very kid-friendly practices that involve senses. Don't just read Matthew or Luke's infancy narratives to them! Put together a crèche at home; visit beautiful churches and tell stories from the stained

glass; deliver beautifully wrapped gifts to shelters; bake cookies and share with family and friends. Tell the stories of faith behind the lines of familiar Christmas carols. The meaning of the Christmas season comes alive when stories about Jesus are wedded to actions imitating Jesus.

Similar ideas apply the rest of the year. Don't just teach forgiveness; tell the story of **the Lost Son** and then practice forgiveness—really practice it—at home. Take time when they are calm, teach the meaning of saying "I forgive you" (instead of the more bland "it's okay"), and then walk them through the action of forgiving someone. Find ways to celebrate forgiveness in your family. The father of the lost son threw a party. Your family might celebrate by making a special dessert when you have been able to show forgiveness after a difficult conflict.

Use the opportunity when a celebrity is on TV or in a crowd to tell the **funny story of Zacchaeus**, who wanted to see Jesus so badly that he climbed a tree. Or when your family is at a party, tell the story of Jesus' first miracle at a **wedding in Cana**, when he turned water into wine just so the guests could continue being happy together. Do some service work together, and use the opportunity to introduce your children to your nameless friend the **good Samaritan**. In every case, the objective is to show that your own way of living is an imitation of a story in Jesus' life, and to help them grasp the meaning of that story by connecting it to some kind of sensory experience that will stick with them.

Prayer is an extension of the conversations that you have together in your family. You bring God into the joys and concerns of your family life. Make prayer simple and relatable. **Recall the day**; pray for loved ones; pray for what your children hope for or are afraid of. Teach them that experience is the holy ground where Christ walks with them. They will, over time, hopefully, want to know more about Him.



Six Sacred Rules for Families

Tim and Sue Muldoon (Ave Maria Press, 2013)

Tim and Sue Muldoon bring a wealth of experience as parents, spiritual guides, and religious educators to a practical book for parents that offers six sacred rules for integrating faith formation into everyday family life. This basic guide to family spirituality not only provides parents with the practical tools they need but also offers the refreshing perspective that faith is not about adding to our to-do lists. Rather, it means doing what we already do with a new attentiveness. Drawing from the treasury of Ignatian spirituality and the breadth of Catholic tradition, the Muldoons present six sacred rules that encourage, stretch, and revitalize family faith—helping parents give their children basic lessons in learning to pray, deepening love, widening faith, and cultivating a spiritual vision of life.

“Parenting is already an act of faith. You don’t know what kind of person your kid will grow up to be. Everything you do is guesswork on some level. Every decision as a parent is predicated on faith,” says Tim Muldoon.

Sprinkled with stories from the Bible and references to American films, *Six Sacred Rules* is an accessible guide that can help parents find authentic spirituality “embedded right in the messy midst of [everyday life].” The aim of the book is to help parents equip their children with a religious vocabulary and faith practices that give them the tools with which to make more reflective judgments when they are older.

“A lot of parents are overwhelmed and are content to outsource their children’s religious development,” says Muldoon. “We teach our children manners, language, even things about sports we like, but we don’t want to teach them religion? Ours is a culture of pluralism and so we have to be more deliberate about what it is we want to pass on.”

The Muldoons’ Rules for Family Spirituality are:

1. God Brings Our Family Together on Pilgrimage
2. Our Love of One Another Leads to Joy
3. Our Family Doesn’t Care about “Success”
4. God Stretches Our Family toward His Kingdom
5. God Will Help Us
6. We Must Learn Which Desires Lead Us to Freedom

The Muldoons’ accumulated wisdom as both parents and educators converge in *Six Sacred Rules*. “This is not just theory. This has been road-tested,” chuckled Muldoon, whose children are 13, 11, and nine. The book shows parents how to invite their children into rich, spiritual traditions as a way of helping them develop the habits of being more reflective, thoughtful and loving. The hope is, he said, that these practices will provide a launching point for children so that as they get older they make the connection between these practices and God and Jesus.

“Authentic spirituality begins with practices that bring us to things that are good. The key word is practice,” said Muldoon. *Six Sacred Rules* highlights practices families can incorporate into their home life, such as grace before meals, Nativity scenes and Advent calendars, blessings before big events, and service projects, among others.



Faith Without Words: On Infant Faith Formation

Jeanne Choy Tate

Awareness of how we first formed our faith as infants re-connects us as adults with faith at its source.

Faith forms first without words. Faith lives in our bodies before it is named. In our wordy Western culture, adult faith too often drowns in words. The tsunami of doctrine that confronts us easily overwhelms its source.

By contrast, an infant's whole body is their mind. Long before words give names to faith, it speaks its message in the tender touch of caregiving—in the loving glance, in a reassuring response to cries, in the anticipation of daily routine. Awareness of how we first formed our faith as infants re-connects us as adults with faith at its source.

Faith is formed through acts of caregiving.

You, the infant, are born into a family story. This story welcomes you to a place of belonging. It holds you as special and unique. If you are born in a family of faith, the story of faith embraces you as well. Knowing the support of a community larger than themselves and trusting God's faithful presence, your parents carry this faith in their bodies as they cradle the newborn you.

Even the most tentative new parent comes bearing a melody of body rhythms. You, the infant, lean into that heartbeat and still your breathing on the rhythm of their breath. In their sheltering arms, your body learns to sing a song of harmony.

Jeanne Choy Tate is the author of *Something Greater: Culture, Family and Community as Living Story* (WipfandStock 2013). As a bilingual/bicultural early childhood educator in San Francisco's Chinatown and Presbyterian lay pastor, she discovered the interdependent values of Chinese culture to be, in many ways, closer to the values of early biblical communities than modern individualism. In an M.A. with Robert Bellah and a Ph.D. at the Graduate Theological Union, she explored how infants and young children are invited to share in a heritage of culture and faith. Visit her Facebook page: www.facebook.com/JeanneChoyTate.author.

This article appeared as part of the "Passing on the Faith: Teaching the Next Generation" Symposium on Patheos.com: www.patheos.com/Topics/Passing-on-the-Faith.html. Read all of the articles online.

As their eyes light up with pleasure in your presence, you know a love for simply being who you are. In daily acts of bathing, toileting, clothing, feeding—you experience the comforting order of ritual. In the security of a parent’s reassuring presence, you learn to trust that life is good—“I will be provided for!”

Faith is formed in sacred time and place.

A newborn’s unpredictable rhythms wreak havoc on a parent’s spiritual life, a disruption that continues through much of childhood. Faith in families is more often nurtured in small daily practices than in quiet contemplation. Even as an infant, you sensed when time and space was set apart from ordinary tasks and claimed as sacred.

Grace at meals, taking a tiny moment for gratitude, lays the day’s experiences open to blessing and invites the presence of something greater into family life. This may be all a family

needs to open a portal to the world of faith. Lighting a candle and holding hands can deepen time together. A special chair, a picture on the wall, a shelf for nature’s gifts—can also claim a space as holy.

If family time expands in prayers or Bible tales or song, the awe in tone of voice, the reverent pose, conveys to the infant you the wonder that adults too find in sacred presence. Long before words are needed, you feel an invitation to share in this source of strength and meaning.

Faith is formed at play in creation.

Faith forms in time alone. The dance of sunbeams on your crib, the curl of sand between your toes, the velvet touch of flower—all beckon you to be at play in God’s creation.

The world around seems oh-so-much-larger than tiny infant you . . . and yet creation holds you safe in its embrace of beauty.



Something Greater: Culture, Family, and Community as Living Story

Jeanne Choy Tate (Wipf and Stock, 2013)

Will the next generation still honor the values of caring for others and contributing to community life? The psychology of individualism that underlies American life is no longer adequate to guide a future filled with diversity. America's children may have wings to soar into the future, but they lack roots connecting them to a shared heritage. *Something Greater* explores the impact of individualism on American child-rearing practices, and its inability to deal with diversity while sustaining life together in families and communities. By contrasting the intergenerational values of biblical and Chinese communities and current infant research with her own experiences in San Francisco's Chinatown, the author reveals how the living stories of heritage that lie at the heart of human development speak to a deep American hunger for shared values and connectedness in family and community.



Doing Children's Ministry Differently

Book Excerpt: *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (IVP Books, 2013)

David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith

Lakeside Community Church is changing. When it began over twenty-five years ago, the five families that embarked on this church plant met in a local community center in the suburbs of a mid-sized city in North America. Their goal was to “bring God’s message of salvation” to their city, often through community outreach programs. Over the years the church grew and grew, and blueprints were drawn up for a large auditorium and a gymnasium to replace the original sanctuary, which would become the children’s and youth ministry wing.

A few years ago one of the members of Lakeside’s pastoral team became interested in conversations surrounding how to reimagine and expand common understandings of what it means to be authentic followers of Jesus in the twenty-first century. He shared a few books and blogs with his senior pastor, who thought that the authors had some good points. The senior pastor wondered if Lakeside had been losing touch with the culture of its city, even though it had always sought to be “relevant.” Armed with a book budget, he searched through the virtual shelves of online book-sellers for more resources about how to engage contemporary culture while remaining faithful to a commitment to follow Jesus.

And these two pastors weren’t the only ones starting to see things differently. As they were becoming energized by their searches for new ways of being the church and following Jesus, so were others in the congregation. Eventually, after careful consideration and countless board meetings, Lakeside Church decided that the time was right for beginning a missional offshoot in

David Csinos is the founder and President of Faith Forward, the organization born from the 2012 Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity conference. He speaks regularly about faith formation and is author and editor of *Children's Ministry that Fits* (Wipf and Stock, 2011), *Faith Forward* (CopperHouse, 2013), and *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (with Ivy Beckwith) (IVP Books, 2013). (www.davecsinos.com)

Ivy Beckwith, Ph.D. is director of educational ministries at Rutgers Presbyterian Church in New York City. She is the author of *Postmodern Children's Ministry* (Zondervan, 2004), *Formational Children's Ministry* (Baker Books, 2010), and *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (with David Csinos).

This article is excerpted from the Introduction to their new book *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (IVP Books, 2013) and is reprinted courtesy of IVP Books.

the downtown core of their city. The new group, iChurch, aimed at making a larger impact in the city and connecting with a new demographic of potential members.

Led by a seminary-trained, hip-hop-loving pastor in his mid-thirties, iChurch attracted a number of young couples, many of whom had children. The fact that the community met in a coffee shop meant that people who had been disenfranchised or skeptical of more mainstream churches could find a place where they were more comfortable.

For the most part this new missional gathering focused its energy into reaching twenty- and thirty-somethings in their city's gentrifying downtown core. Anticipating that some of these young people would bring along their children, they hired Marvin to be iChurch's part-time children's director and began renting a room for children's ministry in an art gallery across the street from the coffeehouse.

The young children's director was commissioned with running a program that would reflect the missional, forward-thinking vision of iChurch while teaching children what it means to be authentic followers of Jesus in today's world. Marvin searched high and low for a curriculum based on the sort of values that iChurch embraced, but came up dry. Without the time and budget to develop his own curriculum, he began looking for books and online resources about children's spiritual formation with new forms of Christianity so that he could adapt a more conventional yet readily available off-the-shelf program to suit his community's particular context and needs.

Marvin uncovered a few blog posts and read some recent books about ministry with children, but he was still overwhelmed with the daunting task of developing a program that nurtured children in this new faith community. Where was he to turn for ideas and support? Many of the children's ministry resources that he'd been encouraged to use by the leaders of iChurch and other children's ministers actually reinforced theology and practices that the leaders and members of this new faith community were questioning and

moving beyond. It seemed like literature about new ways of being disciples and resources for children's ministry were worlds apart. Marvin began to wonder if children even have a place within the burgeoning conversation about how to be disciples in the world today.

Across the pond Sheila was also beginning to raise important questions about children's ministry. As the director of children's formation for a diocese of the Church of England, she was responsible for overseeing children's ministry throughout the region. She was known to pass along a magazine article or recommend a podcast to children's ministers and leaders, and she was always on the prowl for innovative ways to nurture children's spiritual lives.

One unusually warm spring day a few years ago, she made her way to a large urban church to attend a lecture by a North American pastor who had been experimenting with expanding understandings of and practices for following Jesus, and had written a few books on the subject. She found herself wanting to stand up and shout "Amen!" or "That's right!" as the speaker talked about how the church needs to make the shift from modern to postmodern ways of being disciples of Jesus. "After all," he said, "as much as some people decry the word postmodern, we live in a postmodern world. We need postmodern churches and postmodern faith."

At the end of the lecture Sheila rushed to the microphone that was eagerly waiting to take questions from members of the audience. When it was her turn to speak, she introduced herself as the director of children's formation for the diocese and asked her question: "How do the sorts of shifts in culture and church that you spoke about affect how we do ministry with children here in the UK as well as in other parts of the world?"

The speaker paused for a moment, seemingly caught off guard by Sheila's poignant question. "That's such a great question," he replied. "And it's one that I've thought about many times. Unfortunately, I don't have an answer. And I don't really know if I'm the right person to offer an informed

response to your question. I do think that children are important members of the church—this is something that I’ve come to believe more and more since becoming a parent a number of years ago. But I think that people like you—innovative leaders who are committed to kids and who are knowledgeable in areas such as formation, education and theology—you’re the ones who can lead us in a revolution in children’s ministry, a revolution that helps us better form children into disciples of Jesus. So, please, search for a response to your question. And when you find one, let me know what it is, because the future of children’s ministry—and the future of the church—depends on it.”

Sheila went back to her seat filled with energy and passion to explore ministry with children in this time of transition, change and challenge in the church and the world. She went home and immediately began ordering books that the speaker had mentioned in his presentation so that she could understand these new forms of church that are sprouting and growing around the world. She knew that a number of people in her diocese had started a “pub theology” group that was geared at discussing Christianity amid current cultural shifts like postmodernism, postcolonialism and globalization. She began attending their gatherings and visiting churches that were exploring innovative and fresh ways of doing and being church.

Over the next several months Sheila wrote articles for Anglican magazines. She began a blog about new kinds of children’s ministry, and compiled a short bibliography of resources about children’s ministry and contemporary forms of church. And all the while she reflected on and experimented with how to do children’s spiritual formation in ways that reflected the expanding theology, practices and values that she was coming to develop. She approached the diocese for funding to develop a curriculum for children’s education that was appropriate for churches and other ministry leaders who were making similar shifts in their views and practices of Christian faith, yet remained faithful to her Anglican

tradition. With each step on this journey Sheila was reinvigorated with an energy that was contagious to the children’s ministers in her diocese. Within a few years she had changed the face of children’s ministry in the Church of England through infectious spirit and her curriculum, “Come to Me.”

Children’s Ministry in the Way

These two fictional scenarios mirror situations we’ve encountered and stories we’ve heard from folks in many parts of the world. And to a degree we see ourselves in Marvin and Sheila. Change is happening in the church as clergy and laypeople ask important questions about the shape of theology, ministry and the Christian faith in contexts characterized by profound cultural shifts. Resources abound that describe and prescribe these movements to reexamine and rediscover faithful Christianity in many corners of today’s world.

In the past number of years we have been involved in churches and broader conversations that are intentionally seeking to explore new ways of following Jesus and helping others do so in our present age. Through our involvement in these churches and through talking with many others who are on similar journeys, we have discovered that current models of children’s ministry don’t always fit in these forward-looking faith communities—there’s a disconnect between what adults are learning and doing and what children are learning and doing in the very same congregations. And this worried us. In the words of Melvin Bray, “I don’t know that we can have a new kind of Christianity if it’s just for adults and [if] we don’t find a way to pass our faith and our faith traditions, these new faith traditions and rituals that we’re creating, along to our young people. It’ll die on the vine.”

This made us think about what children’s ministry in the “way of Jesus” (children’s ministry that is faithful to the teachings and

life of Jesus) might look like in churches and in other ministry contexts that join us in our frustration over this disconnect. What would this type of children's ministry value? How would this sort of children's ministry view children and their places within the church? How would this kind of children's ministry teach the Bible, deal with children's questions and nurture relationships?

As we envisioned children's ministry in the way of Jesus, we also realized that it had implications for all kinds of churches and contexts. As we shared ideas in conversations with colleagues and in presentations at conferences, we were overwhelmed to learn that children's ministers, Sunday school teachers, camp leaders and parents in all sorts of churches and from all over the world are wrestling with the same questions we wrestled with on our journey to write the book. We realized that the concepts, ideas and practices we share in the book have implications for anyone who is truly interested in the helping children love God and live in the way of Jesus.

As we seek to remain true to the conversations and ideas surrounding faith and ministry in our contemporary world, we realize that what matters most is faithfulness to Jesus and the way of faith and life that he shared through his words and actions. An exciting and innovative approach to ministry is worthless if it diverges from the peace, love, wholeness and restoration inherent in the gospel, and if it does not educate and encourage children to become authentic and faithful disciples of Jesus.

Guiding Assumptions

Many Paths on a Common Quest

There's been a surge in the past decade or two of folks who are trying to move the church forward, folks who are writing, ministering, and speaking about how to be Christian in the world we find ourselves in. As it has always been throughout the history of Christianity, people in all sorts of denominations and

contexts are expanding their views and practices surrounding what it means to follow Jesus in our world here and now.

Our experiences have taught us that while many of these people are on a similar quest, there are different roots that are being planted and different branches that are sprouting. As followers of Jesus have set out on journeys to reimagine church and faith, they've taken all sorts of new paths. Some leave well-worn trails and bushwhack, breaking with old traditions and forging new ones in the process. Others trace their steps backward and reflect on where they have come from and how to reinvigorate their church, denomination and faith tradition. Others still courageously venture out on paths that may be new for them, but are really trails older than the hills through which they wind.

We haven't had one particular path in mind. Instead, we've tried to remain true to the broader quest shared among all these pilgrims. We find pockets of vitality in all sorts of places, from churches breaking new ground on their journeys to live in the way of Jesus to age-old denominations that may seem to grow dim as they struggle to retain members, but are really waiting for a phoenix to rise from the ashes of former flames. So whether an Anglican diocese like Sheila's is seeking fresh ideas for doing church, a group of folks who aren't part of established churches are gathering at a local pub for sessions of "theology on tap," or a band of renegade Catholics or Baptists—or, better yet, Catholics and Baptists together—are meeting together to explore how to live as authentic Christ followers in today's world, children's ministry in the way of Jesus matters.

Gathered and Scattered

What is church? Ask ten people and you might get a dozen answers. For some, church is where people attend worship services. For others it's a community that gets together to encourage and support one another on their faith journeys. For others still church is an

organized religious denomination, like the Presbyterian Church or the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We believe that the church is all of these things and more. We have a very broad view of church, one that makes room for all sorts of ways that Christ followers gather and scatter in the world. So when we speak of the church, we aren't just referring to Roper Street United Church and to the official practices and activities that occur there. We're referring to all the ways that we as followers of Jesus are the church, as individuals, families, NGOs, community organizations, denominations and, yes, even local churches.

Sporadic Involvement

The days of children and families coming to church on a regular basis are over. We can't assume that children are going to show up every week, that their parents are going to bring them to every (or even most) church activity. In a presentation a few years ago, sociologist of religion Reginald Bibby asked a large group of ministers to raise their hands if they considered two Sundays a month to be a good turnout for even the most committed families in their congregations. There weren't too many hands that weren't in the air.

With this in mind, we believe children's ministry needs to become more than just Sunday school, church services and midweek programs. While we value these traditional forms of ecclesial life and, as you'll see, we believe that children need to be part of them, children's spiritual formation can't rely on Sunday mornings to form authentic disciples of Jesus. After all, church is more than Sunday services!

Pastors, parents and teachers need to become more creative and innovative in their approaches to forming children, looking at how to make a significant impact in the lives of children who have won perfect attendance pins and those that are only nominally involved in local parishes. We hope that what we offer in this book will spark ideas for how you can nurture the spiritual lives of children

in whatever context you minister—in families, local churches, camps, schools, community centers and all other places where children's spiritual lives are nourished.

For Better Formation, Let's Do Children's Ministry Differently

In a 2012 article Donald Stuss lamented the disconnection between medical research and treatment. It takes much too long for research in the medical field to evolve into outcomes for patients. The solution, in his view, is to do science differently.

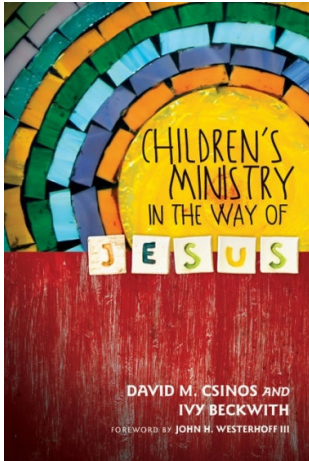
How do we do science differently? Stuss shares four elements of emerging approaches to medical research. First, patients need to have meaningful roles in how their treatments are developed. Second, scientists need to see all research as part of a continuum or web, with the more basic aspects affecting those that are more complex. Third, researchers need to become interdisciplinary, and researchers in different fields, institutions and specialties ought to work together. Finally, scientists and those in industry need to collaborate early in the research process.

This short article highlights how valuable it is to think creatively, to try new approaches and test out new ideas. And the four ideas Stuss offers can be adapted for improving Christian formation. We continue to hear so many people involved in ministry with children and youth (and adults) lament about how difficult it is to get children interested, to keep youth involved in church and to connect Christ with the rest of their lives. And almost everyone seems to have their own opinions about the person, attitude or model that's to blame for these problems.

But maybe medical researchers aren't the only ones who need to do things differently. Maybe to do better spiritual formation, to form better disciples of Jesus, we need to do children's ministry differently.



BOOK DETAILS



Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus

November 2013

\$18, 208 pages, paperback

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Doing Children's Ministry Differently

"Popular approaches to children's ministry equate good children's ministry with glitzy, fun programs that parents and congregations appreciate for giving them respite from children's presence. In contrast, Csinos and Beckwith define children's ministry as serving and caring for children, leading them in turn to serve one another and the world as Jesus' followers. This insightful book will help congregations – not just 'children's ministers' – explore what Jesus meant by teaching us to welcome and be led by children."

– Diana R. Garland, dean of the Baylor University School of Social Work and coeditor of *Journal of Family and Community Ministries*

In *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* children's ministers David M. Csinos and Ivy Beckwith draw on research in human development and spiritual formation to show how children can become disciples and churches can become centers of lifelong discipleship. They write:

Children's ministry at its best isn't really about programs. It's about ministry. . . . Children's ministry isn't merely providing cognitive input about that one moral or theological point each story or lesson was meant to teach. It's not about helping children fall in love with the "dreamy Jesus" portrayed in their Sunday school workbooks. It's about helping them live as committed disciples of the radical way of life Jesus calls us to. . . .

When we use the term children's ministry (or ministry with children), we refer to all those ministerial practices and activities that are done with children. As you'll discover in these pages to come, ministry with children happens when adults of all ages form friendships with young people, when we work to ensure that all children – regardless of age, ability, culture, race, gender, class and family life – receive radical hospitality, when we worship as a congregation with young people as active and meaningful participants, when we engage in theological (and even non-theological) conversations with children, when we take their questions seriously, and when we link arms with young disciples to work for justice and care in the world.

Key points:

- Children's ministry is not about programming; it's about formation.
- Children's ministry in the way of Jesus takes children seriously.
- Children's ministry has the power to shape the way church is often done.
- In churches exploring new kinds of Christian faith, children's ministry can't continue using models and theological assumptions that the wider community has moved beyond or unlearned. Children need to be part of these forward-thinking faith communities.

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Krista Carnet, broadcast publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kkcarnet@ivpress.com
Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com
Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or awright@ivpress.com
ivpress.com/praxis