



Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

Volume 8.3

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Spring 2015



Models & Practices for Lifelong Faith Formation



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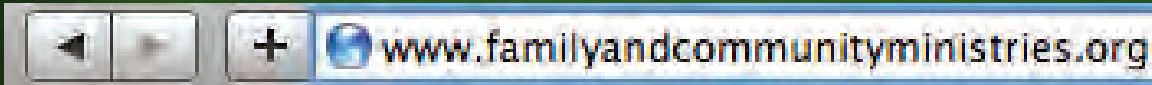
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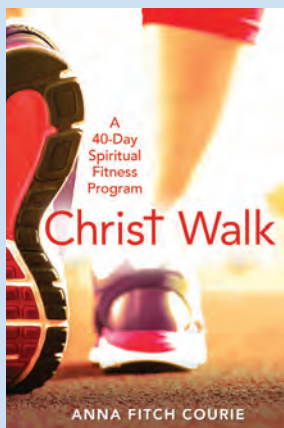


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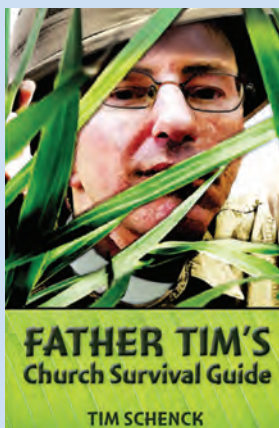
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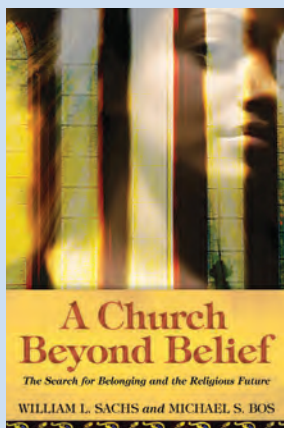
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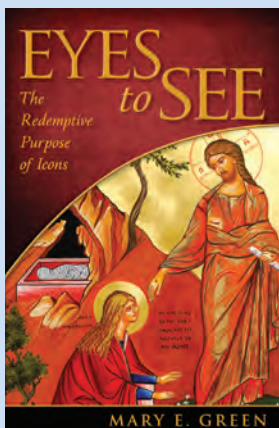
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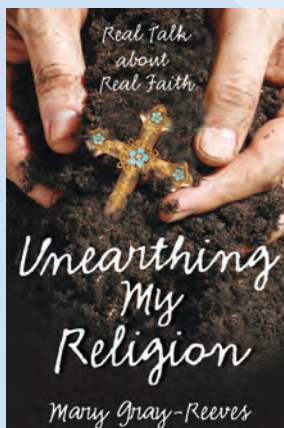
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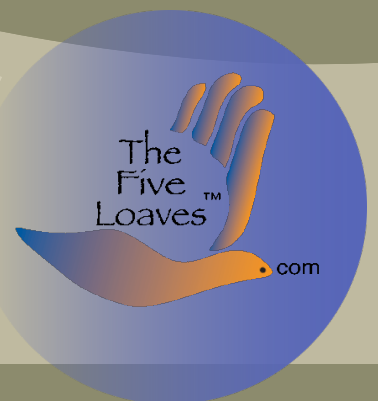
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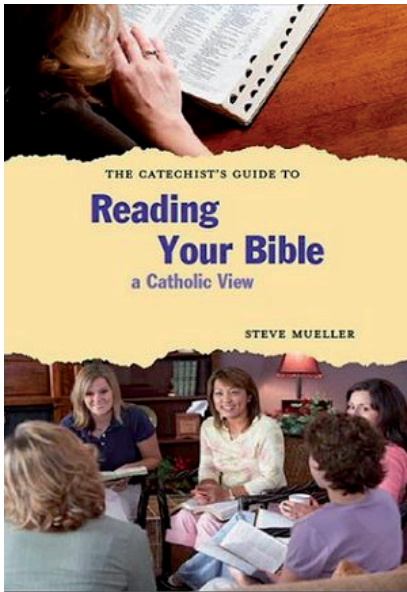
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Overview

Do you want to know what the Bible is? How to read it? What Catholics believe about it? In a simple, accessible style, Steve Mueller addresses many of the problems and concerns that catechists, parents and adult learners commonly face as they begin their journey of faith through Scripture. This guide is perfect for those who are new to Bible study as well as for those who want to increase their knowledge of the Bible.

Author

Steve Mueller, PhD has taught Philosophy, Theology, Scripture and Catholic Studies, and helped develop and taught for many years in the renowned Denver Catholic Biblical School. He was formerly editor-in-chief of the monthly periodical for Eucharistic Spirituality *Living with Christ* and a managing editor for Morehouse Education Resources. He is the current editor for *Words of Grace: Daily Reflections & Prayers for Catholics* for All Saints Press (www.AllSaintsPress.com).

Praise

Reading Your Bible is a magnificent resource and guide for all catechetical ministers who desire to come to know, understand and deepen their familiarity with God's Word in history and in mystery. It is certain to enrich, broaden and transform our catechetical initiatives.

-Edith Prendergast, RSC
Director Religious Ed., Archdiocese Los Angeles

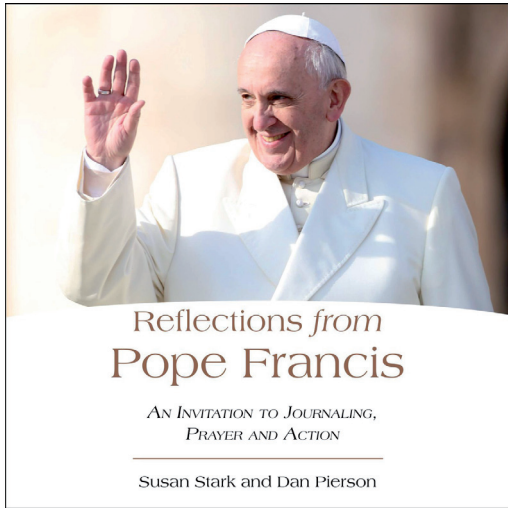
Concise and comprehensive, this book can go a long way toward taking away fear of the Bible and educating every reader to a deeper, more accurate and less naïve reading of the Scriptures. Catechists and many others will love this book.

-Frank DeSiano, CSP
Paulist Evangelization Ministries, Washington, DC

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Susan Stark
Daniel J. Pierson

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A journal-style book containing inspirational messages from Pope Francis—Time magazine’s Person of the Year for 2013

Reflections from Pope Francis features brief excerpts for reflection from Pope Francis’s homilies, speeches, and addresses—along with invitation to prayer, writing, and action in a unique “journal style” book with space on each page for the reader to write down their own reflections on the powerful messages contained within each page. Complete with a focusing statement and scripture passages that introduce and summarize the theme of that page’s reflection, these excerpts highlight important themes for humanity—such as care for the poor, mercy, forgiveness, and brotherhood.

Reflections From Pope Francis can be used in many ways in the parish: adult education, catechist formation, small faith sharing groups, prayer and reflection to begin pastoral staff and parish committee meetings, and young adult ministry.

Praise

“We have in this volume a vision of how Pope Francis sees the mission of the Church and of society. His reflections are inspiring and challenging, demanding and joy-filled. Anyone accepting the invitation to journal with Pope Francis will be enriched.”
—Bishop Robert Morneau, auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Green Bay

“*Reflections from Pope Francis* is a mosaic of shards and snippets of papal wisdom, insights by a Bishop of Rome with the common touch, an attractive humility, and a deep familiarity with scripture, the human condition, the yearning call to holiness.”
—Michael W Higgins, author of *Thomas Merton: Faithful Visionary* and *The Unquiet Monk: Thomas Merton’s Questing Faith*

“For those who want to know more about Pope Francis, but are short on time, this book has a wealth of wonderful, brief selections that are perfect for prayer and reflection. Pierson and Stark capture the pope’s theology of mercy and his call to live more joyfully and authentically as followers of Christ.”
—Julie Hanlon Rubio, author of *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* and Professor of Christian Ethics, St. Louis University

“Susan Stark and Dan Pierson have done us all a great favor by gathering gems from Pope Francis’s statements during his first year as Pope. Each selection touches on a key aspect of the Pope’s ministry; the sentences or paragraph selected capture his heart and spirit so well. With ample space for reflection, journaling, and sharing, this book serves well as a resource for individual reflection and small-group exchange. Evangelizers, pastors, preachers, religious education directors, and those serving as adult faith formators will cherish this wonderful collection.”
—Father Francis P. DeSiano, CSP, president of the Paulist Evangelization Ministries

“If the world had to pick a CEO of Compassion, Pope Francis would fill the post ably. His words remind us of the opportunity to make every moment shine with grace and of the freedom that comes from opening our hearts.”
—Kristin Ohlson, author of *Stalking the Divine*



Starting Afresh with Children and Families

Craig Mitchell

“**W**ho would like to make a video of today’s story?” Hands leap up around the group. About thirty children and adults are seated on cushions and chairs in the church foyer. “We have four activities today—video making, craft, an interactive game, and a prayer station. You have 40 minutes. You can choose which activities to join in during that time.”

Alive@5 is a monthly gathering for families with elementary school and younger children, mixing worship, learning and community time. It was birthed four years ago as an attempt to build a new future for our congregation in Adelaide, South Australia. In many ways it is still a fragile experiment in a new way of ‘being church’ together.

Craig Mitchell is a volunteer leader in children, youth and family ministry at Rosefield Church. He is the coordinator of a number of groups and programs including Alive@5 (described here), Interactive Easter and Interactive Christmas, an annual Church Camp and annual biblical Teaching Weekend. Craig is a member and former Chair of the Church Council. He is also the National Director for Formation, Education and Discipleship for the Uniting Church in Australia. Craig is an adjunct faculty member of the Dept. of Theology, Flinders University, and a doctoral student in the area of Christian education. He lives in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia

Addressing the Decline

Rosefield Uniting Church has been a medium-sized church by Australian standards. A decade ago there were 250 people attending worship and about 50 children and young people actively connected with the worship and Christian education programs. Today there are half that number in worship and just a handful of children and youth. This is the story of many, many churches in Australia and the US—a slow but steady decline, with an ageing congregation wanting the young families to return and ensure the future of the church. It is a familiar tale.

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) was formed in 1977 from the union of the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches. A recent national census by NCLS indicated that the median size of worship attendance across all UCA congregations was 35 people, with 41% of these churches in rural towns of less than 2,000 people. Our churches have an average worship attendance of just 3 children across all congregations. 43% of them have no infant baptisms. (Powell et al) Clearly, something drastic is needed.

Congregations of the old Protestant mainline denominations... continue to sponsor many educational activities, but they lack the intentionality, the coherence and the continuity needed to maintain and renew their identities as communities of faith. (Foster, 45)

His critique is that there is no longer much coherence between what denominations do and what they hope for in the life of congregations. Churches go program shopping while denominations are consumed by issues of structural reform, financial and property woes, and ministry placements. The key word for me is “intentionality.” The keep challenge is to adapt.

Charles Foster sees three particular challenges for churches:

1. *Reclaiming a notion of learning conducive to forming faith in the education of congregations—in particular through the interdependence of developmental, practice, and discovery learning*
2. *Revitalizing congregations as catechetical cultures of faith formation and transformation—in particular through “the interplay of formal and informal social processes and practices that maintain and renew vision, values and practices through the generations.” (Foster, 9)*
3. *The cultivation of an ecclesially grounded educational imagination in congregations—this is an adaptive challenge based around events in the congregation’s life rather than a technical challenge of new curriculum or activities.*

Fresh Steps in Mission

Just as the decline in attendance was becoming evident, Rosefield Uniting Church employed a part-time children’s worker whose role was to commence a daytime playgroup ministry to pre-school children and their parents. This was immediately successful and led to playgroups being run three mornings a week, plus a group for babies. Within two years, about 100 families were connected to the church through this ministry.

Yet only a couple of these families became connected with the Sunday morning worshipping congregation. Some brought their children for baptism, yet even they did not engage with the church community.

Alive@5 was born as an attempt to bridge the gap, not as a stepping stone to Sunday morning, but as a place to belong for those who might never connect with a more formal, structured worship service. We began in 2011 with “Interactive Easter,” a public, all-age event on Palm Sunday evening, and the

following month started **Alive@5**, which runs from 5.00-7.00 pm once a month.

The **Alive@5** pattern is fairly constant:

1. Arrival activity (since people drift gradually)
2. Welcome and theme introduction
3. Song
4. Prayer of thanksgiving (usually participatory)
5. Scripture passage: usually participatory or using multimedia
6. Contemporary version of the Scripture passage: storybook, drama, puppets, video
7. Brief theme commentary
8. Activities: three to five activities (30-40 minutes)
9. Show and tell: sharing with others what we did and learned
10. Prayers for others: sometimes this is incorporated in the activities
11. Song
12. Blessing: writing a blessing each month to match the theme
13. Meal: church folks are rostered to provide a stand-up 'finger food' meal and people stand around and chat

The seating and mood are informal. We seek to blend Christian and vernacular language—to speak faith in everyday terms. We want to avoid anything that looks like a caricature of Sunday School (everyone cutting and pasting to make the same item). Encouraging parents and children to interact is key, although a constant challenge.

Our inspiration for **Alive@5** was “Messy Church”, an approach to starting a new faith community that has emerged from the UK and has become quite popular across Australia. We looked at and learned from Messy Church, but for both educational and theological reasons took a different approach. This included a more inductive and expressive approach to both listening to and responding to the Bible, hence the activities being a response to the

Word rather than an introduction to the theme or text.

Themes

As we are writing our own program each month, we've been free to choose and develop our themes, short series such as:

- exploring the life of Jesus
- exploring parables
- exploring “big” characters in the Old Testament: Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Naomi
- exploring practices of faith: forgiveness, prayer, hospitality
- exploring life themes: friendship, family, pets, heroes, food
- exploring creativity: drama, music, play
- exploring faith themes: creation, faith as a journey, Pentecost

The “big characters” series linked people from the Hebrew Scriptures with recent animated movies, such as Queen Esther with “Brave” (Theme: Courage), King Solomon with “Frozen” (Theme: Finding Our Gifts), Joseph with “Up” (Theme: In Your Dreams), Jacob and Esau with “Monsters University” (Theme: Rivalry). We've centered themes around storybooks such as Dr. Seuss' “Oh, The Places You'll Go” and Maurice Sendak's “Where The Wild Things Are”.

Alive@5 takes a narrative approach to Scripture. We try to find ways for people to experience and enter the story, not assuming that they are familiar with the details, yet allowing the sweep of the story to do its work. We selectively use videos of the life of Jesus to introduce the context of the story, and we're big fans of Sparkhouse's *Holy Moly* video series².

Activities

Each month, several activities take the place of a sermon or homily. Our hope is that across their range, the activities are multi-age, multi-

sensory multi-intelligence. We would rather give people opportunity to explore the narrative than tell them what it means. (The prior plenary theme conversation is the opportunity to open up the story.) This is probably the hardest part of the gathering to plan and succeed with. Activities include art, craft, drama, games, music, prayer, making videos, simulation activities, food, puppets, and anything else we can dream up.

We try to avoid giving people a particular craft to make, preferring instead to give them a range of materials, an idea (such as making a card for a friend) and letting them create their own response to the theme and Scripture.

Hands-on multimedia is a common activity. People have made movies with smartphones, composed music using a loop pedal, acted in “green screen” videos (with biblical scenery and a TV news desk setting added behind), made dance-beat songs and raps using keyboards and sampled sounds, taken photos of miniature Lego scenes to tell a story in tableau, and used mobile device apps to create ambient tunes as backing to a psalm of praise.

Generally, people can go to any activity in any order and spend as long as they wish at them. Occasionally we have run sequenced activities for the whole group (acting out “Where the Wild Things Are” together) or structured simulation activities (each group simultaneously preparing a meal for another group as an expression of hospitality). Most activities are facilitated while some are self-directed, such as the prayer stations.

We have learned to ensure that there is at least one activity suitable for children under four years of age. Involving parents and grandparents is a challenge, as many are inclined to stand back and watch the children, so we are constantly trying to design their participation.

When we gather back as a whole group after the activities, “Show and Tell” provides an opportunity for anyone to share something about what they did and what it meant for them. Each gathering closes with a simple blessing that we say together, reflecting the

theme, written in plain language, reminding us that God loves us and is always with us.³

Interactive Easter and Christmas

Our “Interactive Events” started at Easter and Christmas in 2011 with the aim of engaging both the church and the wider community with the stories behind these key celebrations in the Christian year. Easter in Australia is a four-day holiday weekend when many families with children go away for a brief vacation. Christmas falls in the middle of a two-month long school break. So on Palm Sunday evening we explore the story of Easter from Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem to Easter Sunday. Three weeks before Christmas we invite people to encounter the narrative of Jesus’ coming and birth. Whether or not people come to worship on Easter Sunday or Christmas Day, they will have had an encounter with the story.

Like **Alive@5**, these “Interactive Events” involve music, drama, art, craft, stories, prayer, games and food. Otherwise they are quite different. The events are open from 5-7 pm. People can come and go when they wish. The sequence is like this.

1. *Arrival activity*: a simple craft activity in the church foyer
2. *Telling the Story*: a 12 to 15 minute presentation in the church, introducing the story of the event using music, video and drama
3. *Activities*: up to 15 activities throughout the church premises, allowing people to explore and respond to the Christmas or Easter story
4. *Final activity*: the last activity is either the Christmas stable or the empty tomb, a darkened room which expresses the culmination of the story.
5. *Food*: people exit to our church tennis courts where there is a BBQ and opportunity to relax and chat. At Easter time the BBQ is ‘fish fingers’ and bread as a reminder of Jesus’ resurrection appearance on the beach.

Interactive Activities

While our activities are varied, we've developed something of a pattern that helps with planning. The pathway through the building follows loosely the events of the celebration—from Palm Sunday through to the Last Supper to the Cross to the Resurrection, from the Annunciation to Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem to the birth of Jesus.

Activities include self-expression on the theme through a range of art activities (painting on tiles, clay), some guided craft work (making palm crosses or angels or Easter butterflies), a computer with a range of short movie clips telling the story, activities such as "Christmas around the world" where people share their home traditions, making theme-related food (such as pretzels as an expression of Easter), and a story-reading tent. A few activities need special mention.

The Last Supper

At Easter time we "black out" our crèche with black plastic and set a table for twelve with plates and cups, candles and Middle Eastern food - dried fruits, olives, pita bread, assorted dips, nuts, dukkah, grapes, bottles of grape juice and wine. A projector screens a loop from a Jesus movie showing the Last Supper scene. The dialogue is turned off. Ambient music is playing. People are invited into the space in groups. Any child must be accompanied by an adult (in pairs). On each plate is a printed parchment which welcomes people to the table and invites them to tell the story of this night to one another.

We allow people about 15 minutes at the table, but every time we have to almost forcibly eject them as they want to stay, eat and drink, reflect, and talk. It is a somber highlight of the event. Every 20 minutes we reset the table and welcome the next group.

Prayer Stations

On some occasions we have set up a pilgrim's prayer walk through parts of the story—the

events of Holy Week or the events leading to Jesus' birth. Five or six stations are set in a candle-lit room. The stations feature classic and contemporary images, video loops, recorded music and sound effects (a rooster crowing), art installations (sand, pebbles and sandals to symbolize a journey) linking the story with contemporary experience, tactile prayers activities (such as magnetic poetry), and symbols to hold and take away (a palm cross, a nail, a coin). The reflections have been an amalgamation of the work of Cheryl Lawrie from Australia⁴, "Mucky Paws" by Roddy Hamilton from Scotland⁵, the Iona community⁶, and my own writing (see references at the end of the article), as well as various collected poems and prayers. We have also included display tables with Easter symbols or nativity scenes from around the world.

Any child entering the room must be accompanied by an adult. This is to invite conversational engagement with the stations across generations.

The Stable and Empty Tomb

The final room is a stable or a tomb, in both cases an enclosure built with a steel frame and black cloth, carefully lit and arranged with simple. We narrate part of the story using poetry or prose. On occasion we've had Mary and Joseph with a very young baby in the manger. There has also been live, reflective music by the remarkable Leigh Newton.⁷ People each receive a laminated blessing and symbol to take home—last Christmas this was a wooden cutout star with the word "Shine," our theme for the event. It is an effective, reflective culmination to the experience.

Reflections on Our Experience

Drawing on the experience of churches in the United Kingdom, we're seeking to grow a "fresh expression" of church, not another group or program, but what might become a

new faith community.⁸ The Church of England recently completed a ten-year longitudinal study of “fresh expressions” across ten diocese.⁹ Across their study, about 25% of attendees were churchgoers, 35% were ‘de-churched’ and 40% were ‘non-churched’. “Fresh expressions” were led by teams of 3 to 12 people. The average size of each “fresh expression” was 43 participants.

Alive@5 is attended by 20 to 40 people each month. It’s not a large gathering, yet half of those who attend have no other regular contact with the church. Our Interactive events attract 80 to 100 people; about half are people who don’t attend Sunday morning worship. Yet we are seeing the same faces and parents and grandparents bring children to these special occasions. While we would welcome a large influx of people, our limited success after four years mirrors the experience from the UK of fledgling faith communities.

Creating a monthly experience that mixes worship, learning, and genuine community is a significant challenge. It would be much easier to have a curriculum! We occasionally borrow ideas from resources such as *Spill the Beans*¹⁰, the United Church of Christ’s *Faith Practices*¹¹, and Lifelong Faith’s *Living Well*¹². Yet it is difficult to find activities that take the imagination and spiritual life of the child seriously, avoid shallow explanations of biblical texts, and don’t involve mass reproduction of a craft item. Added to this, we want to operate at the high end of technological learning. After four years, we have a bunch of local leaders and parents who “get” what we are trying to achieve, yet few of them are able to author the kinds of activities that fit our educational ethos.

However our biggest challenges in terms of evangelization are relational—building friendships across our playgroups and engaging pastorally with the families who connect with **Alive@5** and our Interactive events. Christian community is more than liturgy or learning, it is about living and becoming disciples together. At least we’re on a worthwhile journey towards this.

Work Cited

Foster, Charles. *From Generation to Generation*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012.

Website Links

- Many of our **Alive@5** and Interactive Christmas and Easter programs can be found here: http://craigmitchell.typepad.com/mountain_masala/alive5 or go to the Worship Resources Links.
- See an album of our promotional images here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/craigmitchell/sets/72157652116624745>
- Here are photos of **Alive@5** Interactive Christmas and Interactive Easter: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/craigmitchell/sets/72157649786509393>

End Notes

- ¹ <http://www.messychurch.org.uk>
- ² <http://wearesparkhouse.org/kids/holymoly/try/>
- ³ Download our **Alive@5** blessings here: http://craigmitchell.typepad.com/mountain_masala/2013/05/blessings.html
- ⁴ <http://holdthisspace.org.au>
- ⁵ http://abbotsford.typepad.com/abbotsford/mucky_paws
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- ⁸ <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/essential>
- ⁹ <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/anglicanresearch>
- ¹⁰ <http://spillbeans.org.uk>
- ¹¹ <http://www.ucc.org/faith-practices>
- ¹² <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/living-well-chapters.html>



Building Intergenerational Relationships between Children and Adults

Jolene Roehlkepartain

You can transform your children’s ministry without additional funding, without recruiting more volunteers, and by instigating one small change: You can alter your children’s programs in a way that gets not only children and their parents talking—but everyone in your congregation.

What’s the change? Making your children’s ministry intergenerational.

Jolene Roehlkepartain is a writer and speaker on family, children and teenagers, and spirituality. She is also the founder and president of Ideas to Ink, LLC, an innovative company based in Minnesota that focuses on the areas of parenting, children’s issues, youth development, spirituality, and education. Jolene has written 31 books, including *Raising Healthy Children Day by Day*, *Parenting Preschoolers with a Purpose*, *101 Great Games for Kids*, *Teaching Kids to Care and Share*, and *Taking It Personally*. She has also coauthored 10 books, including *Doing Good Together* and *What Young Children Need to Succeed*. She has previously been featured in broadcasts and publications including National Public Radio, The Washington Post, Time, Psychology Today, KARE 11 TV, Glamour, and Woman’s Day.

We instigated this change in our congregation a number of years ago by doing only one thing: We created a program called Faith Partners

This easy-to-do program ran from our children's ministry, but it was a congregation-wide program. All that was required was that interested children, youth, and adults from the congregation sign up to be a faith partner.

We made the commitment short and easy: It was a three-month commitment to get to know another person from the congregation of a different generation. Some partners went out of their way to say "hello" to their partner whenever they were at church. Others sent birthday cards and invited a partner to go out for hot chocolate or ice cream. Others invested more time to develop long-term relationships. We encouraged partners to focus on giving the gift of themselves rather than giving store-bought gifts.

We let parents decide how old a participating child should be. Some parents signed up toddlers and preschoolers. Others signed up elementary-age children. A few parents even signed up their infants with the idea of their family getting to know another adult. We worked with the youth ministry to recruit teenagers, and we encouraged adults of all ages to sign up. The point? To get to know someone else in the congregation—and that it was easy. Everybody could do it.

The first year, about 25 children and 15 adults signed up. We then worked to recruit other adults to make the pairings even. We focused on some of the elderly attendees, especially the ones who felt a bit disconnected. Once adults learned that the program was about going out of their way to say hello and smile at a specific child, adults quickly signed up.

Within a few weeks, other parents, children, teenagers, and adults who hadn't signed up began asking how they could participate. They wanted to be part of something that they clearly saw had strong benefits. Relationships formed. People laughed more. People smiled more. We created more pairings, and the program grew.

When we created pairs, we always made sure someone in our group knew the adult and the child being paired. Ideally, you want to create pairings that will succeed and also protect both children and adults. If you don't know someone, it's important to find someone who does know the people you're pairing. You don't want to endanger anyone or pair a fragile person with a domineering personality.

The program changed the culture of our children's ministry—and the entire congregation. People started seeking out their partners and getting to know them. It gave them another purpose to come to church: to say hello and talk to their faith partners.

"A church program can't spiritually form a child, but a family living in an intergenerational community of faith can," writes Ivy Beckwith, a children's ministry consultant and speaker (Beckwith, 14).

Taking an Intergenerational Approach

Too often, children's ministry becomes an age-segregated ministry. Depending on the number of children who attend our children's ministry, we group children by age: infants with infants, toddlers with toddlers, preschoolers with preschoolers, and so on. If we have small numbers of children, we still lump them together by age: young children with young children and older children with older children. It makes sense. Developmentally children of different ages have different needs and interests. But we lose something when we focus only on specific ages.

When children's ministry leaders focus *solely* on one age level—infant, toddler, preschool, early or later elementary—the spiritual nurture of children is limited. Children are best served when leaders chart an integrated path for the "developmental career" in all related ministry programs of the children from

birth through entering the young adult years (Issler, 65).

One of the most effective ways of charting an integrated path for children is by helping them form intergenerational relationships with other adults in the congregation. As children grow, they know other adults who they can turn to, they know other adults who cheer them on and care about them. In return, the children reciprocate. They create a community of caring toward the adults in your congregation as well.

Tapping the Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships

Although an intergenerational approach to children's ministry can transform your children's ministry and your congregation, it also has many other benefits as well.

Bridging the generation gap

Children's ministry is not the only ministry in the church that's heavily age segregated. So are most ministries. Adults work with adults. Teenagers meet with teenagers. Children hang out with children. Studies have found that when ministries take an intergenerational approach, the generation gap closes (Bales, Eklund, and Siffin, 677-689).

Promoting sharing and helping among children

When children participate in intergenerational programs, researchers have found that children benefit by becoming more willing to share, help, and cooperate with elderly people (Dellmann-Jenkins, Lambert, and Fruit, 21-32). Compared to children who didn't get involved in an intergenerational program, these differences were significant (Dellmann-Jenkins, Lambert, and Fruit, 21-32).

Enhancing children's literacy

Children make huge strides in language, literacy, and reading achievement when adults

read aloud to children through intergenerational programs (Bus and van IJzendoorn, 1-21). Adults who may be afraid of children often feel much more at ease if they're asked to come and read aloud books to children. That way adults don't have to think about discipline issues or changing diapers. Reading aloud is a great way for adults to connect with children in easy ways. Too often we rely only on our commitment volunteers and parents to read aloud to children. When we expand this to all adults in our congregation, everyone benefits.

Improving attitudes of children

When children don't have much interaction with older adults, they get scared of them. Because so many children have grandparents who are either dead or who live far away, many children today don't get the opportunity to interact with older people. An intergenerational approach changes that. When children get to know older adults through an intergenerational event or program, they're more likely to think positively about older people and accept them more (Couper, Sheehan, and Thomas, 41-53 and Aday, Sims, McDuffie, and Evans, 143-151).

Cutting down on discipline issues

Most children's ministers and volunteers dread disciplining children during children's events and programs. Discipline is difficult to do, and it's hard to find effective methods that work with all children. Intergenerational programs decrease discipline issues because children get to know other adults, and these relationships create a shared view of how children and adults act. Researchers have found that children's behavior significantly improves through intergenerational programs (Cummings, Williams, and Ellis, 91-107).

Encouraging children to ask for help

A key developmental task for children to learn is how to recognize they need help and seek out help from trusted adults. Intergenerational relationships—when they're done well—

encourage children to do this. In fact, researchers found that children were more likely to seek out help from adults in their classroom when they've been involved in intergenerational events or programs (Dunham and Casadonte, 453-464).

Creating better social interactions for the elderly

When an intergenerational program or event works well, not only do children benefit but so do the adults, especially the elderly.

Researchers found that after an intergenerational program with preschool children, elderly adults interacted socially more often with others and were less likely to isolate themselves (Short-DeGraff and Diamond, 467-482).

Recognizing the Barriers to Intergenerational Relationships

If so many benefits exist, why do so many congregations resist creating intergenerational relationships? Because our society finds it easier to keep people segregated rather than integrated. Search Institute researchers found that only about eight percent of adults are engaged with young people outside of their families (Benson, 210).

"We need to make it the norm that all kids are *our* kids," Peter Benson, the former President of Search Institute writes. "We need to encourage that attitude in unrelated adults who do not feel that responsibility, and we need to find ways to invite and foster involvement by the adults who do feel that responsibility but have no natural connections to schools, youth organizations, or congregations in their daily lives" (Benson, 105-106).

We live in a society that believes that only parents nurture the lives of children (Benson 210). A lot of congregational children's ministries buy that as well, with the majority of children's ministry volunteers being parents of children.

With our age-segregated society and congregations, the truth is clear: Children are scared of adults and adults are scared of children. Each group has a lot of assumptions about each other that are not true. We tend to see people of other age groups as "problems to be fixed and threats to be avoided, not as potential friends, caring neighbors, and energetic contributors to community life," as Peter Benson writes (Benson, 211).

Setting Effective Intergenerational Ministry Goals

How do you program well for inter-generational children's ministry? Setting effective goals is key. Researchers Roy Ballantyne, John Fien, and Jan Packer identified a number of effective goals.

Expanding knowledge

In children's ministry we often want children to learn something. The true is for your intergenerational component. What's key, however, is that activities need to be interesting and fun. You want people to engage and initiate conversations with each other. "Simply enjoying a program or experiences is not enough," they say (Ballantyne, Fien, and Packer, 13).

Using experiential activities

Hands-on activities deepens the experience for both children and adults (Ballantyne, Fien, and Packer, 14). You don't want people to sit and listen. You want them to move, experience, and interact in meaningful ways.

Building skills

Ideally, you want to create an inter-generational experience that builds skills, whether those skills are conversational skills, listening skills, or a hands-on skill, such as using a hammer to make a birdhouse (Ballantyne, Fien, and Packer, 14).

Learning problem-solving approaches

Children, like adults, can get overwhelmed with problems. Addressing issues that both children and adults care about (such as recycling or cleaning up a dirty area in your church yard) can help both children and adults feel like they're making a difference and are empowered to solve problems (Ballantyne, Fien, and Packer, 14).

Changing behaviors

How can your program or event encourage participants to change their behavior, even in the smallest ways? Maybe it's getting them to read more, to pick up an extra can of soup to give to the community food shelf, or to notice each other and say hello. "Overall, 82 percent of parents reported observing some degree of change in their children," researchers Ballantyne, Fien, and Packer found with effective intergenerational programs (Ballantyne, Fien, and Packer, 14).

Building relationships

The most important, goal, however, is creating easy ways for adults and children to connect and build relationships. In our Faith Partners program, we provided conversation starters in the church bulletin and church newsletter to help partners connect and talk more deeply. "The goal is for each and every young person to experience many points of formal and informal relational support every days," Benson writes. "Even seemingly small gestures—calling children by name, acknowledging their presence, exchanging greetings, smiling when passing a young person on the street or in a hall—are important molecules of support that, accumulated over time, create a critical mass of positive nurture" (Benson, 105).

Encouraging relationships beyond your group

Building relationships between children and adults is only the first step. The next step is to encourage people to continue deepening their relationships, particularly after your activity or

event is over. Researchers have found that even more benefits (such as better attitudes toward people of other ages) when children and adults had intergenerational contact outside the group (Wenzel and Rensen, 523-540).

Transforming Your Ministry with Intergenerational Relationships

Through our Faith Partners program, we discovered that children got to meet and get to know more adults than if we hadn't started the program. The same was true for adults as well.

Our Faith Partners program gave people the opportunity to meet others in easy, non-threatening ways. Relationships formed and deepened. People began to reach out to each other even outside of the program because we created an intergenerational culture that permeated every aspect of our congregation (okay, maybe not the meeting of the trustees). But even with people who strongly clung to their comfortable groups, we saw an opening. Children have a way of breaking down barriers between people, especially adults.

It's time to start transforming our children's ministries so that they're more than offering programs for children. They're about enriching the spiritual lives of children and the adults in your congregation. After a few years of doing Faith Partners, we found that recruiting volunteers became easier because more adults had relationships with the children and wanted to spend time with them. As children grew older, they wanted to keep coming to church (instead of disengaging) because not only did they have friends who were their age, they also had adults they enjoyed seeing. Focusing on the strengths of intergenerational community, we discovered more strengths of everyone in the congregation, from the youngest to the oldest.

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Where Are You Going on Your Mission Trip This Summer?

Bronwyn Skov and Shannon Kelly

It seems like a simple enough question, especially if your youth group or young adult community engages in this perennial rite of passage over the course of the program year. But this can also be a Pandora's box of a question. "Why do we "do mission trips"? Are we engaging mission as disciples? Or are we essentially doing youth and young adult ministry tourism with a volunteer service component? Are we fully committed to relationship building through cultural immersion? Or are we privileged people going off to help "those poor folks?" Are we breaking the bonds of poverty by addressing injustice and generational oppression? Or are we being generous and polite and trying to "do the right thing" in the name of Jesus?

It gets a little fuzzy when we explore our motivations around the tradition of mission trips. In the wake of so many natural disasters in recent decades we've witnessed the coining of new phrases like "compassion fatigue." Non-profit organizations have had to make the distinction between relief work and development work. And organizations who claim to be missionary in nature have had to grapple with the negative connotations around the word "mission" which can invoke deep emotions around historic colonialization, the cycle of poverty, and the loss of indigenous languages and cultural heritage.

There can also be great value in taking youth and young adults away from familiar settings to bond as a group, to learn about people and places unknown to them, and to engage in hard work to accomplish a common goal. Our hope is that we can help guide you to positive mission engagement without causing personal hurt or institutional harm. Attitudes and practices related

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to mission and service have changed considerably in recent years, shifting away from “doing to” or “doing for” toward “doing with” or “being with.”

Discerning Mission

Speaking from our own experiences of ministering to youth and young adults in the Episcopal Church where we have served at the congregational, regional, and international levels, we realize that the first crucial step in planning mission is to ask yourself and your ministry team what your motivation is for taking a mission trip. Did someone tell you that you had to do it? Did your group discern that it wanted to go on a mission trip? Are the parents pushing you to go? Are the youth and young adults saying that they want to engage in mission? Are you doing it because other ministries in the area are engaged in mission? Do you feel called to engage in mission so you can learn, experience, and discover?

This is the time for you and your ministry team to be honest with yourselves about what your core values for the mission trip are and how you can be guided by them in this process.

Through collaboration with members of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in the early 2000s, members of the youth ministry leadership team for the Episcopal Church began to explore the notion of mission *exchange* rather than mission *trip*. Eventually core values and operational principles were developed to reflect these shifts as related to mission experiences, cultural immersion opportunities, and pilgrimages. The Episcopal Church then applied these core values into the development of a Youth in Mission Manual. (<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/episcopal-youth-mission-manual>)

Following is an excerpt from the introduction of the manual that was released during a youth event the summer of 2014. “Be forewarned: ‘doing with’ and ‘being with’ call for a bigger personal commitment than simply doing a job for someone or visiting a religious shrine. But they also lead to richer, more

rewarding experiences.” To achieve that end, the manual stresses the following about plans for mission engagement (these can easily be adapted to reflect your faith community, religious affiliation, and guiding principles):

- Mission travel should be clearly defined as an experience based in spiritual practice on the understanding of our faith through our Baptismal promises, and on the hallmarks of mission as outlined in the Five Marks of Mission. (<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/five-marks-mission>)
- Participants must respect the dignity and integrity of every community and individual by being open to diverse cultural expressions and/or by allowing community partners to define their own needs and assets for meeting those needs.
- Organizers should emphasize a mutual relationship between people rather than simply observing, working for, or serving another and should be focused on sustainable development and possibly systemic change in addition to single acts of isolated kindness.
- A significant amount of time and energy should be committed to spiritual, emotional, and practical preparation and community building among missionaries as well as appropriate follow-up and follow-through when the trip is done.

Mission engagement that has integrity and potential for transformation shouldn't be a simple stop, drop, and go-on-a-summer-mission-trip mountaintop event. We need to explore the depth of our motivation through the lens of our Christian identity. We also need to invite our young people into mission as a new chapter in the story of their own journeys in faith. We need to take steps in preparation to open their hearts and minds to experiencing discomfort, deep sadness, boundless joy, frustration, guilt, gratitude and many, many questions. We need to teach them

to receive unexpected gifts, and to find ways to be vulnerable so that relationship, kindness, understanding, and compassion can grow.

Mission Discernment and Reflection

Discernment is an important part of the process for planning a mission experience. Discernment is the process of determining where and what God is calling you to do. This takes time as you read Scripture, reflect, and do intentional listening to each other and to God. Below are a few ideas for Bible reflections that may help you discern where God is calling you.

Gifts Reflection

Approach your discernment by first naming the gifts you have and then reflecting on how God might be calling you to use those gifts.

Bible Reflection One

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (1 Peter 4:10)

As people of God, we are all called to use the gifts that God has given us to serve one another. Use this scripture to reflect:

- What gifts has God given you?
- How can you use your gifts to serve?
- How can you use all of the gifts to engage in mission?
- In what ways can you or are you serving those around you?
- How are others serving you?

Bible Reflection Two

What are you going to do with what you have been given?

- Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-25)
- Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11)

Both of these scriptures offer an opportunity to reflect on what you have been given by God and what you do with those gifts. Read one or both of the scriptures and reflect.

- What gifts do you have to share with others?
- In what ways are you sharing those gifts?
- Are there other ways those gifts can benefit the community?
- What new thing is God calling you to do with your gifts?
- What gifts do you see in others?

Now that you have had time to reflect, how do you think God is calling you and your group to engage in ministry? How can this engagement in mission help youth or young adults live more deeply into their journey of faith? How might you open yourself and your community to transformation through this experience?

What Kind of Mission?

Pray, think, and talk about what kind of mission experience you and your group are feeling called to do. Outlined below are five different kinds of projects.

1. *Social Action*: educates young people on how oppression operates in our society. This kind of experience helps the participants recognize how God is already at work among those they encounter.
2. *Cultural Immersion*: educates young people through total immersion into a specific culture so they can learn through their experience.
3. *Spiritual Pilgrimage*: a journey that you undertake as a quest for a religious purpose
4. *Disaster Relief*: assisting those who need help after a disaster such as hurricane, tornado, or severe storm
5. *Community Exchange*: a mutual project where two communities spend time in

each the other community to learn and pray together

Preparing for Mission

A deep, honest, thorough mission discernment process should yield a call to a specific type of mission and potential partnerships and locations. Once you have determined the nature of your community's engagement make sure that you communicate this to your local faith community before you make the invitations for support and participation. Explain whether it's a social action project, cultural immersion, a spiritual pilgrimage, disaster relief, or a community exchange.

Money

Your group will need to prepare a detailed budget that includes transportation, food, supplies, insurance, and lodging. Once you have a budget, you can determine how you will pay for the trip. Do you have money in your budget? Does the church have discretionary funds they can use? Will you need to do a fundraiser? What will the participants pay to offset costs? Will some participants need scholarships? As you think through cost and funding, don't forget to think about other groups in the congregation or your region who may have funds to help with mission.

Education

The next step following communication about the opportunity should be education. The entire congregation should be included in this step, even if the invitation for participants will only be extended to one segment of the population, like youth and/or young adults. Mission engagement should be taken up by a group of individuals from an informed community together from a place of knowledge, encouragement, and group support and interest. All ages should be able to engage the mission even if they aren't the ones being sent. Plan educational opportunities that include activities, projects, and prayers so all

can feel a part of the engagement. Make sure that similar opportunities can be offered within the community where your group will be going so that the sending and receiving communities can begin to build relationships and share expectations. Part of the education of the community may also be including them in fundraising and supporting the project monetarily.

Logistics

Make sure you and your team of adults plan out all the logistics of the trip.

- How will people sign up?
- What is the deadline for registration?
- When is payment due?
- What medical forms will you need?
- What insurance will you need for the trip?
- Make sure you have permission slips, medical, legal, media release, and behavior covenant forms on file
- Research what you will need to do if you travelling internationally.
- Arrange transportation far in advance and try to get a good deal by talking to the company or airline.
- Create a schedule for communicating with the participants as well as the parents.
- Plan meetings far in advance so people can get them on their calendars. Make sure you communicate which ones are mandatory.
- Give the participants a packing list at least a month before the trip.
- Create your schedule while you are traveling and make sure each team member knows what they are responsible for each day.

Commissioning and Sending

When you engage in a mission trip, you are being sent forth as a representative of your community. Before the group leaves, the faith community needs to have the opportunity to

prayerfully commission them to go forth to engage in that mission. Ideally this will happen on the Sunday morning before the trip begins. It can also be a prayer service devoted specifically to this task. Below is a sample Commissioning Service.

Commissioning Service

Worship Leader:

Friends in Christ, we have come together from near and far to create this remarkable community. We gather today to ask God's blessing on us as we go into the mission field. Let us open our hearts to all we meet on this journey, remembering that we all are the body of Christ.

Leader: There are different gifts,

People: but the same Spirit who gives them.

Leader: There are different ways of serving God,

People: but it is the same Lord who is served.

Leader: Each one of us is given a gift by the Spirit,

People: to use for the common good.

Leader: Together we are the body of Christ,

People: and individually members of the body of Christ.

A group of presenters says to the worship leader:

I/we present to you these persons as they prepare to go into the world to do the work we have been called to do.

All Stand

Leader:

People of God, we are sending you forth on your journey of mission so that you may engage in mission around the world. Will

you serve in this special work with energy, intelligence, imagination and love, treasuring your experiences as opportunities to teach and to grow?

People:

We will.

Leader:

Will you support one another in prayer as we venture into the world to do our mission work?

People:

We will.

Leader: Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, we come before you as servants called to go forth from this place to build, share, and engage your mission. Bless us as we go forth to _____ (insert some of the mission opportunities). Surround us with your loving care, protect us from every danger and bring us safely home again so we may continue to share your love and grace with everyone we encounter.

Coming Home

Coming home is the beginning of the next step on this journey. Now is the time that all of you have the opportunity to make sense out of the experience. It is important to find time to talk about the struggles and the joys, the fears and the hopes, the regrets and the dreams. Were there unmet expectations? What were their learnings? If they were to go on a mission again, what would they want to be different? What would they want to be the same? What would they hope for and work toward on that mission?



A Formula for Summer Ministry

Lee Yates

Are you preparing to gear up or close up for the summer? While offering great opportunity for special events and creative ministry, summer can also be a season of frustration. The warm days invite people into God's creation and the school calendar invites them to theme parks, beaches, and grandma's house. The transient nature of the season often leaves churches wondering what happened to all the families. Not all families are traveling though. For many, the summer is a fearful time. Saddled with the additional cost of childcare, and without the support of school meal programs, many families struggle financially. This often leaves churches feeling helpless to respond to the swell of need. These different dynamics make planning for summer ministry complicated. We are often tempted to copy and paste last year's schedule (or lack of one), but if we take the time to evaluate the needs of those around us, and plan in advance, summer has great potential for inspirational ministry.

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There are a number of creative summer options but all of them require some level of a resource I call VEO which is “Volunteer Energy Output.” If you imagine your congregation as a large energy tank, and a measure of 100 being full, you can visualize your VEO. For each hour a volunteer spends planning, leading, promoting or cleaning up from an event, VEO is spent. For example, a church yard sale needs people to work for a few hours on a Saturday, plus people to put up signs, organize and haul off leftovers. This requires a lot of VEO as compared to asking for donations during a weekly worship service.

We must also remember the equally precious SEO or “Staff Energy Output.” Every ministry requires one or both of these valuable resources. Planning for summer should start with reflection on how much of each you have available. Figuring out your SEO can be complicated. Some congregations are more dependent on staff than others. To visualize your SEO energy tank, think about the ratio of volunteer hours to staff hours. You will have to use your best judgment to judge its size. For example, one congregation might expect their secretary and custodian to do much of the promotion and set-up for a yard sale while another would be more volunteer driven. Assign your SEO an appropriate number for full capacity. As you enter the summer, how much energy does each thank have? Understanding how much energy your church has to offer is a crucial tool for determining how you give shape to summer ministry.

The next step is evaluating the needs around your congregation. Looking both internally, and into the community around you. Think about the needs of multiple generations. What do children, youth, parents, retirees, and senior adults need? Think about your congregation, the neighborhood around the church, and the larger community. Where do needs overlap? This is a good time to look at traditional summer ministry programs and think about which needs they are meeting. This may help you think of a need you have left off your list and make sure your programming

has purpose. Nothing bleeds a church of VEO and SEO like programs without purpose.

Now it’s time to start making decisions about your summer schedule. What opportunities will you offer the communities you serve and when will they happen? As we discuss various options for summer ministry, keep your VEO and SEO in mind. You might even keep a running tally on a note card as you plan. Remember, every ministry takes either VEO or SEO but most consume both. Events like a spiritual retreat or mission trip might provide some inspiration, refilling VEO or SEO, but there is still a limit to how much a community can pour out over time.

To help balance your summer energy output, I recommend limiting the scope of high VEO events and broadening the invitation for low VEO events. In other words, if a ministry is labor intensive on volunteers, make sure your congregation is being fed by it. Control the setting. If an activity is not labor intensive, invite more people. If a large crowd surprises you, it won’t use up all your VEO. This is probably easier to understand with some tangible examples. Let’s start with VEO and Vacation Bible School.

VBS and VEO

What does “VBS” mean to you? I have to admit, my childhood memories are all blurred together when it comes to summer ministries, but Vacation Bible School has always been a part of the mix. Memories of Vanilla Wafers and Hawaiian punch, scooter boards in the church basement, and loud percussion experiments are precious to me. I can’t put much detail with those memories but they clearly help me connect my understanding of church with memories of joy. Over the years, I’ve moved from participant, to volunteer, to director, to writer. I’ve watched the numbers of kids, volunteers, and the days making up VBS get smaller. This is clearly a high VEO event. It takes lots of people contributing lots of hours and that doesn’t even take into account the

children participating who give their time and energy to the experience.

Many congregations approach Vacation Bible School as an outreach or evangelism program. They invite every child in town and place giant signs out front. Leaders guess at how many crafts and groups will be needed and have to juggle the first night to adapt for the real numbers. Some congregations have started shortening their program to just a few days, or even a Friday evening and Saturday event, mostly because VEO can't keep up with the demands of promotion and the enormity of the unknowns.

In reality, few congregations see high retention in the children who attend for Vacation Bible School. Sometimes a new child will find their way into the community or a new family will keep attending worship. More often than not, the congregation sees a swell of children for the event, many of whom know the activities already because they attended another VBS in town using the same curriculum. At the end of Vacation Bible School, volunteers are spent and staff are in need of a real vacation. This goes beyond the pastoral and program staff to include the custodian and secretary who do more for these types of events than most people consider. For some congregations, the end of VBS is the end of their VEO for the summer. They are spent. They are done. Those running a shortened or scaled back VBS often struggle with more than exhaustion. The event becomes an anal reminder of what used to be. Instead of being excited about the number of children who are there, much attention is paid to all that has been lost.

Shaking the VBS Blues

What if, instead of inviting everyone, you charged a registration fee, for which members could receive a "scholarship" if needed, and asked every child to register like a day-camp? Children could still bring a friend, but someone who pays money will be more likely to attend and registration provides a firm

count for meals, crafts, and volunteer planning. With no need for yard signs and ads in the paper, and a firm understanding of the events logistic needs, VEO and SEO are lowered significantly. This event still takes a lot of energy, but not as much and the church has some fuel left in the tank.

First Christian Church of New Castle, IN made this change three years ago. They actually dropped the VBS name and called it "Day Camp." Instead of 40-50 kids (15-20 from the congregation's active members) for a weekend event, they had 20-25 for 5 days. They also achieved about 90% attendance over a three year period and about 25% of visitors became active participants in the life of the congregation. For one week, volunteers led children in songs, crafts and games. They made fun snacks, and studied scripture. They event did pulled off some field trips since they knew exactly how many were coming.

What if, instead of inviting others to come to you, VBS went to them? Is there a children's home or hospital in your area? What type of program might you offer for them in their own space? What type of relationship could be built between your children and theirs in this time together? Many organizations are offering youth mission trip experiences where they lead a VBS for homeless children or impoverished communities. Could your church take VBS on the road?

What if VBS was divided up and spread out through the summer? Could VBS be offered each Sunday after worship? How would this impact your VEO and SEO? While this model lacks the consistent community build by a week of play and study together, it does allow those who might be out of town on certain dates to only miss a portion of VBS.

What if you created a new model that no one has thought of yet? By taking a look at your VEO, SEO and the needs around you, Vacation Bible School can take on new life.

Is Sunday School Out for Summer?

Some of the extra energy left from a lower VEO program for Vacation Bible School could go into Sunday School. Compared to other ministries, Sunday School is not that high of a VEO event. There is energy output for curriculum and supply organization but the weekly teaching does not have a very high VEO. If one person gives one hour a week, they are not being worn out, unless the hour lacks purpose. For example, if a teacher prepares and is present to teach but only has one child each week, they can become frustrated. Even more so if no one shows up for their class. Low summer attendance leads many congregations to cancel classes over the summer.

Others are experimenting with creative solutions. Public school teachers get the summer off, so why not Sunday School teachers? What if you run an intergenerational Sunday School, combining classes for a couple months. If you run one class instead of four, you have cut your VEO dramatically. What if you invite some other leaders to substitute for a couple months and offer fresh energy? What if you a Vacation Bible School curriculum (different that your week long theme), broken up over 7 -8 weeks? This could provide a fun theme, enticing kids to get their parents up on Sunday mornings. What if youth serve as junior teachers over the summer, learning to lead and helping regular teachers?

Donuts, BYO McDonalds, or an opening sing-a-long in the sanctuary are all ways to pump a little life into an overlooked summer ministry without ratcheting up your VEO or SEO to dangerous levels. Remember, Sunday mornings are hard to predict so don't set yourself up for disappointment. This is probably not the season to do a Sunday School attendance rally, but you also don't have to surrender.

Traveling with the Church

Mission Trips and Church Camps are a central part of many congregations' summer season. Congregations often have long lasting relationships with Church Camps or other shared ministry programs. These events are a wonderful opportunity to fill up the congregation's VEO. Youth and children come back from these events on fire, with God shining out of them in ways that are hard to explain. The energy required for camp participation is usually minimal, with promotion and collecting forms being the most tiring tasks. When you compare that to the energy young people bring back from these experiences, it is most often a gain in PEO. Some congregations have adults who go to camp with their young people. Adult participants may come home ready for some sleep, but filled up spiritually. By getting away from the pressures and expectations of daily life and living in a prayerful community, batteries are recharged and the church is blessed for having a member take time to go and serve. Be careful of an SEO drain in larger congregations if a staff member is expected to collect all forms, transport youth, and be present at the camp. Remember, collecting forms does not require ordination. This can be a shared responsibility. Make sure no one has to do the dirty work all alone. Don't be afraid to invite someone who has not been to camp before to pick up campers. The stories they hear may turn them into next year's volunteer counselor.

Serving others is another way building community and fulfilling Christ's call to "feed my sheep." Some congregations visit work stations that are organized while others create their own projects. Some send multi-generational work teams while others only send youth. Either way, traveling and working together can be a powerful experience. There is a work trip for every church. It just takes a willingness to name your own gifts and interests and the planning to connect them. Like camp, SEO can run high on such trips, but

the results bring energy into the church rather than running it down. This holds as true for week long trips that cover hundreds of miles as it does for local work projects.

Families Logging In

I've heard lots of sermons (many preached during the announcements) about worship attendance over the summer. Ministers twist lots of arms and lay the guilt on very thick to keep people in worship over the summer. While a family having a bonding experience on a hiking trail one Sunday morning might keep them out of worship, it can still be a healthy thing for that family and the church. Remember, the VEO tank has to be refilled somehow. Summer is a time when lots of families are reconnecting outside the hectic pace of school, work, and extracurricular activities. We need to encourage participation in the church community without shaming people for being healthy. There is a very unhealthy assumption in many churches that people can only find Jesus inside their walls and within their community. When families are healthy, churches will be stronger. This is a reality we need to embrace, making sure we are not sending mixed messages.

Not all family travels are for rest and reconnection. Children and youth are going to play on sports teams that travel in the summer regardless of what day they play. Clubs and organizations will offer youth fun opportunities to learn and grow over the summer. While these endeavors may stretch families and lead us to question their priorities, we are better served by meeting the spiritual needs of our families where they are, geographically and emotionally.

What if we spent our SEO and VEO on resources for prayer and reflection that a family could use while hiking or visiting with other families at a soccer tournament? What if we equipped our families for spiritual reflection on their journeys rather than grousing about their attendance in the board meeting, parking lot, or even the pulpit?

Families might pick up a CD of worship songs to sing along with in the van, or listen to a sermon or devotion downloaded to their tablet as a pod-cast. Websites like www.VibrantFaithAtHome.org offer great activities for families of every shape and size to experience outside the structure of the congregation. Church websites can be updated to provide more access to worship for those who cannot physically attend. SEO or VEO could be put into recommending great activities to those who won't be in worship. In return, families might be invited to send postcards of their journey to the church to build a summer travel map. Members could pray for those on the road or those about to leave. Summer could end with a celebration of people sharing "God sightings" from their travels. By adding reminders of God's presence to a family trip or a team's tournament, we actually raise the VEO of the congregation. People feel connected and encouraged. People come back refreshed and aware of God's role in their lives.

Cooking Up Some Community

When people are not traveling, summer can be a wonderful time to build community. A weekly or monthly cookout at the Church or a local park requires very little VEO. A grill, a pack of hot-dogs, and a "bring your own drinks" invitation can do wonders for a community. Throw in a Frisbee and find someone to offer a prayer or devotional and you have taken it to another level. Some Churches that have Summer gatherings around meals invite people to bring their own meat for the grill, offer a dessert exchange, or plan a softball game around the event.

Instead of inviting everyone in town to VBS, what if you put out an invitation for Sunday night cookouts? Neighbors could receive printed invitations. Families could bring friends. It takes a lot less VEO to have a few extra packs of hotdogs in the cooler than

to accommodate unknown numbers at Vacation Bible School. This is one of those places where we can see the principle of VEO and proximity at work. Inviting large numbers to a low VEO event is much more manageable than attempting such an invitation with more complicated ministries. A short social gathering is also more likely to draw an entire family, rather than just the children. This is a great opportunity to connect visitors to the Church family.

What if you added a movie to the evening plans? Those who have dinner plans might come late for a movie and dessert on the lawn. This can provide a longer social time for some and flexibility to others. If you are not charging admission you don't have to worry about any copyright issues and can choose movies that touch on spiritual issues. Some of the most popular movies have a strong message about a social issue or dive into life experiences that our faith can inform. What if the next Sunday's sermon was connected to the movie? Suddenly we are connecting fellowship, study, hospitality and worship with low VEO events. Someone is writing a sermon already. There is no additional SEO required to connect these dots. In the end, such ministries might actually bring in as much energy as they require to organize.

Church as a Mission

While many attempt "spring cleaning" at home, it can be difficult to find time in midst of Lent, Easter, Spring Breaks, and preparation for summer ministry to really give the Church building the attention it needs. Sunday School classes keep meeting and other activities have assumptions about the consistent availability of space. Summer might be a good time to switch things up. If you are combining Sunday School classes, this is a great time for cleaning, painting or basic repairs in unused class rooms. Even if you are not combining classes, the Sunday youth are on a retreat is a great time to fix up their regular meeting space. If you are doing worship outside once a month, that

offers a 13 day window for paint or furniture polish to dry in the sanctuary. Projects like these can be high in VEO but often different volunteers than are usually counted on for traditional summer ministry. The person cleaning out the baptistery and the others helping clean the nursery toys may not be the same members who teach VBS. The person fixing light fixtures may not be the same person who drives children to camp. Look at your summer schedule to see how your ministry plans might open the door for other possibilities.

Go with the Flow

Another aspect of VEO and SEO to consider is the order of summer ministries. Look at your calendar and see how close events are to each other and how high they are in VEO. Consider how one ministry impacts the other events on the calendar. For example, it might be exhausting to offer a family work project the week after Vacation Bible School. Still, youth coming back from a work trip might be overflowing with VEO and bring great energy to Vacation Bible School a week or so later.

SEO is also an important consideration in your calendar. When are they getting a vacation? Are they getting a vacation? Many Church staff will sacrifice a family vacation or personal retreat time to support special events in the summer. Each staff member will have different needs. A pastor or "head of staff" may need a rest to catch their breath after Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. If they have a family, there is a good chance Holy Week erased any change of a Spring Break get-away. Early summer may be the best time for them to get away and this needs to be part of the plan. Staff who work with faith formation ministry such as children, youth and families may need their vacation at the end of summer when all special events have come to an end, or even in the fall after programming is back up and running for the school year. Secretaries and custodians can often be forgotten in these conversations. Remember, all events require

communication and cleanup. How is the Church refilling these, often under paid and always over worked, servants? Be sure to consider how SEO of all Church staff is refilled.

Reader Beware and Be Blessed

Just by reading this, you have proven to be one of the most likely candidates for summer burn-out. There is no SPF level of sunscreen that can protect you from flaming out. The only defense is clear boundaries and good planning. Know your own limits and be honest about them. Encourage others to practice self-care while considering their gifts of time, talent and

energy. Running your congregation on an empty tank is dangerous and can have disastrous effects.

Enjoy the summer and allow the unique opportunities that the ever shortening season offer. Cherish the opportunity to evaluate and create, to change and grow. Invite the congregation to experiment and explore what God is up to within them and around them. Along the way, make notes on how much VEO or SEO different ministries consume. Next summer, look back on your notes and you will have an even clearer vision of your Church's potential for ministry. Eventually, you will find the perfect summer formula for your congregation.



Reflections on the Content of Adult Faith Formation

Janet Schaeffler, OP

In their pastoral letter on adult faith formation, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops categorize, with broad strokes, the six tasks of catechesis (#88-96), giving us content areas for a comprehensive formation into life as a disciple of Jesus Christ: 1) knowledge of the faith (doctrine, teaching, Scripture, etc.), 2) liturgical education (worship, sacraments, etc.), 3) moral formation (morality, justice, lifestyle, etc.), 4) learning to pray (devotion, contemplation, retreats, etc.), 5) education for community life (strengthening relationships), and 6) missionary spirit (living and spreading the Good News). (For some examples of the possible variety of offerings that fall within each area, see www.janetschaeffler.com. Go to AFF Helps and explore *What Are We Providing for Adult Faith Growth?* See especially the charts “through the lens of the six content areas.”)

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Surveying some of the offerings in any given congregation, we might draw the conclusion that adult formation is primarily designed to support adults in their ministry roles within the church and provide help prior to a new beginning (parents of children preparing for sacraments, couples preparing for marriage, etc.)

While these two foci of adult faith formation are extremely important. We need to remember that we are called to do more than this. Our vision of adult faith formation call us to do more than this. The research on motivation for adult learning challenges us to intentionally listen to the life stories of each individual, graced by God's everyday presence, and this calls us to do more. The various needs present in our diverse world—the many cultures, the ever-growing expanse of ages of adults, the vast array of family and life situations, and more—call us to do more.

What Is the Point of Adult Faith Formation?

We are called to live a life centered in Christ. Richard Reichert suggests that this means: to walk with, to be a companion, to be committed to Jesus; to learn from Jesus (to think and judge like him); to participate in Jesus' mission and ministry (to act like him) (40).

We are called to connect faith and life. Our call is not just to be Sunday Christians, but to be faith-filled Christians in our everyday lives. Vatican II boldly proclaimed that the greatest heresy of our time was the separation that Christians make between their life in the world and their faith. We are called to mission, called to bring about the Reign of God: "a mission in and to the world. . . to transform the social and temporal order" (*OHWB*, #72). In the words of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo (2009 NPCD Convocation): "You never meet the risen Christ without getting a job."

The "point" of adult faith formation is not only to call forth and prepare ministers, and involved parishioners (as important as that is)

and to prepare parishioners for the celebration of the sacraments (as important as that is), but to engage disciples who connect faith and life, who are on fire with bringing about the Kingdom of God in today's world.

In the words of Linda Vogel, "Religious education that insulates us from the problems and potential of the global village in which we live does not follow Jesus' example" (95).

Each and every offering/process of adult faith formation, then, invites participants to:

- Make the essential connection: between faith and life.
- Go to the center of what life is always about: What does my faith mean for how I live life today? for how I relate to all those around me? to all of God's world? to God?
- Be aware of our unity: What does faith mean for how we, as a community, make decisions and engage with each other? With those we don't see but upon whom our decisions will have an impact?

If this is the ultimate "point" of adult faith formation, it must be tended to in many ways: in the processes used, the varied formats employed, and the "content" of our offerings.

Informing, Forming and Transforming

Another way of understanding the purpose and role of adult faith formation is to reflect on the reality that the mission of adult formation is to inform, form and transform.

"Catechesis informs in all of the ways in which the heart and meaning of the Christian message and the church's tradition are presented in a manner that is meaningful in this time and place" (Regan, 15).

- What methods, opportunities and processes does our church use to "inform" adults of the "heart and

meaning” of the Christian message and the church’s tradition?

- What aspects of church teaching are covered well through our adult formation opportunities, through the life of the church (the parish is the curriculum)?
- What aspects of church teaching might need more attention?

“Catechesis forms in all the ways that people are shaped into the way of life of the believers. (Regan, 15).

- What methods, materials, opportunities and processes are used to “form” adult believers?
- What aspects of “living the faith” does our congregation do well?
- Are there aspects of “living the faith” that need more attention for your parishioners?

“Catechesis transforms the community’s self-understanding of what it means to be church in a particular time and place and the call to be about transforming the interactions and structures of society.” (Regan, 16).

- Has our church life changed, grown, developed as a result of adult faith formation?
- What methods and events have helped “transform” our church as a learning community?
- What are we doing well? Are there things we might do better?

Some Perennial Questions

The following perennial questions are adapted from the work of Tighe and Szentkeresti (3-4).

1. What are the faith formation priorities of our church? Is adult formation among them?

2. Is our church addressing the “tasks” an adult performs rather than the “person” an adult is?
3. Why is the notion that all Christians are called to ministry largely unknown—and ministry not just within the congregation, but ministry in the world?
4. Are we using children’s methods in attempting to meet adult needs?
5. Is our church “telling theological-scriptural-liturgical things” to passive listeners seated in rows of metal folding chairs?
6. Are we reluctant to develop “family centered,” “life-centered,” “problem-centered” programs?
7. Are we focused on “content development” or on the development of “critically-reflective adults?”
8. Do we realize that adult faith formation exists only in relationship to a living liturgy, a Christian community, and a community that is always learning?
9. Are church programs limited to the pastor’s time schedule and expertise?

Another way to look at the perennial questions goes far beyond the topic of “content,” yet is very related to the “content” that is planned within our programs. Tom Zanzig reminds us that each adult is always on a cyclical journey of conversion and spiritual growth:

- *Hungers*: they may change throughout life, but adults are always searching for “the more.”
- *Search*: we are always in a quest to satisfy the hunger; at times the pursuit might be life-giving, at other times it could be death-dealing.
- *Awakenings*: we see, hear, understand things in new ways; these realizations and stirrings are not only intellectual, but can come through all the ways of being human and spiritual.
- *Response*: dependent on many factors (openness, readiness, abilities, etc.), responses will be mixed and varied.

Our very nature of who we are keeps impelling us; we never have it “all done.” Each response moves us deeper into our hungers and the cycle continues. Thus, one of our foundational perennial questions will always be: does each and every adult faith formation opportunity, and everything we do as a parish, help and support adults in this cyclic journey of conversion?

Some Annual Questions

The perennial questions are ones which adult formation committees continually ask themselves, striving to meet the everyday life and faith needs of adults. These questions provide the framework which support all that the congregation does and lives in adult formation.

At the same time, in our pastoral planning for adult faith formation, there are annual questions that always need to be at the forefront (in planning and content). The perennial questions challenge us to be inclusive and integrated, to pastorally envision three-five year strategic plans for adult faith formation rather than just having “flashbulb” adult faith formation projects—a four-week Scripture series here, a three week series on prayer there. Vision and goals allow us to have a comprehensive, cohesive plan. Where are we going? What will be the programs and processes that will fit together rather than scattered programs plopped in at the last moment?

At the same time we need to be constantly aware of the annual questions. This is a fast-changing world. Adult faith formation planners need to be able to adapt, within their long-range plans, to changing conditions while not losing focus or vision. How do the changing conditions and needs coincide with the vision?

Being awake to the “annual questions” challenges us to be aware of all that is happening around us, realizing that in the everyday, real-life happenings dwell the greatest moments of change, learning, and transformation. What do we do in these

occurrences (and other everyday events) to engage all members in learning, in conversation, in prayer, in formation? Consider events such as: anniversaries and commemorations within the church, our country and/or the world; tragedies in the community: devastating fire; suicide; deaths; books and movies that are capturing the interest of today’s adults—both religious and popular.

As we peruse these annual questions and events, it is easy to realize that many are much broader than the initial happening. For example, a change of pastor or a merging of parishes raises the issue of change and transition; the death of a young person or a local or international event of crisis brings up immediate feelings and questions, but also increases the awareness the meaning of suffering and where is God in all this.

As in all adult faith formation, the ways and methods used to address these everyday events, these “annual questions,” are multiple: individual study, workshops, retreats, online learning, and more.

Years ago, Gabriel Moran reminded us: “Since all life is sacred, all learning is religious.” The Whiteheads also reaffirm that adult formation includes all areas which enable our growth to be disciples: “Through Baptism all Christians are called to give service in the name of the Lord. All Christians are ministers. All the baptized are challenged to strengthen the body, to build the kingdom and to live in response to the word. Growth into Christian adulthood is crucial to this ministry. Adult faith formation, therefore, explores all areas that nurture and affect this growth.”

Thus, many leaders in the field of adult faith formation help us to look at the expanse of content for adult faith formation today. Several have suggested that content falls into three categories: 1) content that is specifically religious or spiritual and relates to the teachings of the Christian tradition, 2) content that responds to social, economic and/or health education needs of parishioners, and 3) content that builds community.

Some people might say that, since the goal is the religious development of adults, the content should only include *explicitly* religious content. Does that assume that human development can be compartmentalized, that various aspects of life can be isolated from one another? Is this an example of an artificial separation into the sacred and the secular? McKenzie and Harton say: "Ideally, religion is coextensive with life. The so-called secular experiences of adults are pregnant with the possibility of religious meaning. . . . When adult religious education concentrates solely on topics perceived as sacred or holy, the implication is that a host of educational needs and interests arising out of daily life are trivial, a sort of second-class reality. What shapes a person's religious response, however, is the totality of his experience and not simply that part of life experience perceived as sacred. Likewise, a person's religious response influences the manner in which he experiences all of life and not just a segment of life designated as sacred." (6)

Many theorists concur that all life is sacred and is the content for adult faith formation: "Religious learning can occur in educational activities that do not revolve around the study of explicitly religious themes. Adult religious education. . . . may be religious by virtue of the explicit or manifest content of the educational activity; cultural/psychosocial context in which the activity occurs; intentionality of the learner; intentionality of the teacher. . . . Religion, ideally, permeates life. From this it may be inferred that a program of adult religious education may justifiably embrace topics that are labeled as secular." (McKenzie and Harton, 16-17)

John Elias observes "The function of religious bodies is to determine what areas of adult development need special treatment from a religious point of view."

Tighe and Szentkeresti write, "Solid religious education does not attempt to pour God into the experiences of adult life, but rather to assist the Christian adult in recognizing the holy that has always been active there" (76).

These authors remind us that adult faith formation, our very life, is about being holy and whole. For instance, if a church offers English as a second language for immigrants, with the intent to help them live fully functioning, productive and meaningful lives, is that not religious, responding to the mandate of the dignity of each human person? When a parish explores topics, such as those raised by the [National Issues Forums](#), are not the conversations reflective adult formation, by virtue of the cultural/psychosocial context and the intentionality of the learners and the facilitators?

One current attempt to connect the resources and wisdom of our culture with faith life is [RE-TED](#) (Religious Education using TED.com videos). This is a faith formation discussion ministry using videos from the huge pool of wisdom found on TED.com. While most TED talks are not explicitly "religious," the wisdom provided by the experts who are showcased on Ted.com comes ultimately from God through the speakers' talents, expertise, insights learned from personal experience, and in-depth study.

Content Related to People's Lives and Experiences

In 2007, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted an extensive survey on Religious Beliefs and Practices. Of those who left Catholicism for another church, 71% said that they left the church because their spiritual needs were not being met.

"Effective adult faith formation 'must begin by accepting adults where they are' in their faith, their life situations, their experiences, and their preferred learning styles. Our programs and ministries must be in touch with people's real circumstances and concerns." (OHWB #82)

A 2006 study of best practices found that the number one factor responsible for success in adult formation is attention to what is going on in the lives of adults. "Paying attention to what is going on in the hearts and minds of

adults, what is going on in their lives, is crucial and cannot be overstated. This happens in numerous ways both formally and informally. It is not about what we think they need but rather what they say they need.” (Riley and McBride, #28)

In spite of all that could be taught and the eagerness of the adult religious educator to impart knowledge to learners, educational events will be dull and uninspiring when answers are given to questions which have not been asked or for which there is no expressed need.

The Prophetic Role of Leaders & Communities

Is there a time and place for providing opportunities which parishioners haven't requested? Is it the role of leadership to raise awareness and consciousness, inviting people to go deeper?

Diana Butler Bass suggests: “Part of your job is to navigate between two tensions: 1) Do you accommodate or challenge the congregation's views on God, the Bible, holiness, ethics, and spirituality? Is your job to comfort or discomfort them?; and 2) Do you follow what they think they need or what you and the clergy think is needed? These are not either-or choices, but represent the poles around which you must make some decisions.”

Diana tells of a friend who said: “You know, Diana, in privileged churches like ours, our job is *not* to provide spiritual enrichment, to create more privilege. Rather, our job is to challenge and provoke so that the Holy Spirit may transform us.’ Scott stated it so clearly: enrichment or transformation? Some parishes, particularly those in minority, disadvantaged, or struggling communities, need enrichment. Mine, however, was already rich. It needed God's transforming power. So, I opted to discomfort them with content that the leadership thought necessary for change. Adult Formation was lively and controversial –and always risky—but it also forwarded the overall

mission and vision of the parish. Certainly it is possible—and sometimes desirable—to make less unsettling choices.”

Does your parish accommodate or challenge, enrich or transform? Both? What topics are people not asking for, but are needed for disciples in today's world?

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A Milestones Focus on Adults: Replacing Programs with Relationships

Debbie Streicher

If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults.

In our urgency to “grow the church”, we look around and see an aging congregation and jump to the conclusion that by adding a staff person or a volunteer position to specifically work with youth, our problems are solved. Surely adding someone on staff to help with youth or finding a new program to address declining numbers will make a difference. Time and time again we are finding these are false assumptions. There is no magic pill. As leaders in the church, what are we to do? I believe it is time to embrace the reality in our congregations. In

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mainline denominations, we are graying more and more each year. Time and time again research has shown that what makes the difference is building relationships, not introducing a new program. When people begin to know one another and know each other's joys and sorrows, they thirst to be together. Relationships bring people of all ages back together regularly. Where do we start?

Milestones Ministry, an organization helping households and congregations nurture the Christian faith through life's milestones, promotes five principles for living and passing on the faith:

1. Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships, often in our own homes.
2. The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and ministry of the home.
3. Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church too.
4. Faith is caught more than it is taught.
5. If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults.
(www.milestonesministry.org)

How do we apply these principles without making what we do be a program? How do we take advantage of times to encourage faith formation by bringing faith talk and actions into our everyday lives?

In 2014, Milestones Ministry introduced eight new templates to use as guides specifically designed for milestone moments in the lives of adults. They provide opportunities to celebrate either in the congregation or in the home. Research was done to ask and determine what events in the lives of adults were important and should be the first written as a milestone to experience in a setting in the congregation or do with family at home. Church goes from across denominations voted. The top eight: Retirement, New Job, New Home, Return from Deployment, Marriage Anniversaries, Aging Parents, Empty Nest, and Becoming Grandparents. Next and still in the works are Loss of a Loved One,

Becoming a Parent, Joining a Faith Community, and Connecting Life with Spiritual Gifts.

In January, I presented a workshop titled, "Connecting Faith and Everyday Life with Adult Milestones." I asked attendees to name significant times in their own lives when adding just a *dash* of faith could make a big difference for family and friends. Suggestions surprised me as they began to name times when prayer and thanksgiving are needed but we seldom turn to our faith and add meaningful conversations, prayer and blessing to these happenings. They mentioned organ transplants, paying off a house, paying off a car, and end of medical treatment. It becomes clear that the list of times in our lives to recognize as opportunities to lift up the moment and share with friends and family is endless.

Clear-Cut Steps

The goal has been to provide an uncomplicated means to acknowledge milestone moments in our lives. A basic program is helpful but in most settings, from my experience, we need simple, easy ways to recognize these occasions. How can we do this? The answer is clear-cut.

1. Begin with conversation and invite everyone to be involved. For example ask questions like: *Why is this moment something to talk about?* or *How does it change our lives?*
2. Pray with one another. Encourage finishing sentences such as: *I Praise God for. . . .* and *I thank God for. . . .*
3. Bless one another. Choose a familiar blessing you can use at this time and also daily with one another such as: *"May the Lord bless you and keep you."* or *"May you feel God's love at this moment and always."*

These clear-cut steps lead to building and growing relationships with family and with

friends. They become a traditional approach and response when milestone moments happen in our lives.

The 75 blessings for life's milestones found in the book, *For Everything a Season* outlines basic steps for inviting conversations in small groups or in homes. The steps are 1) Welcome, 2) Prayer, 3) Bible Text, 4) Reflection, and 5) Ritual Action.

The individual milestone modules from Milestones Ministry also outline some basic steps which are named, *The Four Keys for Practicing Faith*. They are 1) Caring Conversations, 2) Devotions, 3) Service, and 4) Rituals and Traditions.

Five Principles

Let's get back to the five principles listed at the beginning of this article. Where do they fit in our lives and how can they contribute to our understanding of the importance of relationships?

1. *Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships – often in our own homes.*
The important words to me in this principle are “trusted relationships”. For some milestones for adults, the home may be the best and only place to take time and provide opportunities for conversation about the milestone. There are both joyous and sad milestones. Building trusted relationships through caring conversations is a step towards faith formation. When conversations, prayers, and blessings bring a family and friends together, faith is formed by the Holy Spirit. The best place for this to happen is in the home.
2. *The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and ministry of the home.*
I have often compared the ministry of the congregation to the children's program Sesame Street and the ministry of the home to the children's television show

Mister Roger's Neighborhood. Sesame Street always chooses one lesson to teach children a day. If the lesson for the day is the color orange, the color orange is seen and heard throughout the program in a variety of ways and taught by repetition. Ministry in our congregations provides many ways to learn about our faith. Prayer is taught and repeated by a variety of people in a variety of places.

From 1968 until 2001, Fred Rogers of Mister Rogers Neighborhood made children feel like he was talking one on one with just them. Children and sometimes adults trusted Fred Rogers for his caring approach. Mister Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian pastor who role modeled and taught us the value and impact of trusted relationships. Ministry in the home likewise is a place to practice and talk one on one about what has been learned in the congregation in a very trusting setting.

We are fortunate if adults spend 2 to 3 hours a week in our congregations. But this is very little time compared to the hours spent in the home. It is imperative that there be a vital connection and partnering of the congregation and the home. What is taught in the congregation needs to be talked about through caring and trusted relationships in the home. Adults need to understand the importance of this partnership for the sake of the church.

3. *Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church too.*
As congregations place tools in the hands of children, youth, and adults for realizing faith practices in the home, a better understanding of the home being a place for faith talk happens. Taking the time for intentional conversations about our lives and connecting them to our faith through prayer and blessing help make the connection between the congregation and the home. If what we do in the congregation is church and the place we

learn of Christ's presence in our faith, then encouraging what we do in the congregation to be done at home results in the realization of Christ's presence in our faith at home too. This helps adults to role model for children and others in their home resulting in the home being church too.

4. *Faith is caught more than it is taught.* This principle helps emphasize the importance of relationships and the need for church leadership to begin helping those in the congregation to recognize that home is the primary and best place for one to role model and teach the faith. One expects to be taught about faith in church. We seldom consider how faith is really "caught." How do we catch something? One definition of catch in the dictionary is *to get and hold something*. In the outfield in order to catch the ball, the player needs to be where the ball is. In the home in order to catch the faith, one needs to be there and get and hold it. This is done by exposure to the faith and happens through parents and other adults in the home where faith is role modeled.
5. *If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults.* Without adult faith role models for our children and youth, our faith would not be passed from one generation to the next. It is this principle that causes me to reflect on the need to prioritize faith formation tools to help adults establish faith practices.

Taking this principle into consideration, rather than seeking staff and volunteers to help with children and youth, I reflect on how transforming it could be if we sought ways to help adults establish faith practices. I believe we make the assumption many already are steeped in faith practices, however; I fear that the opposite is true. If faith formation is perceived as only happening in the church, what consequences can we predict if we do

not emphasize intentionality for faith formation to happen in the home also? How are we helping adults to become Christians? Where in our church lives and in our everyday lives do we walk alongside adults in their faith journey?

If principle five is true, then it is imperative we give attention to adults. Let's begin by building relationships, not starting yet another program. Identifying milestones in the lives of adults is a creative way to open the door to a different approach.

A Different Approach to Adult Faith Formation

Why place an emphasis on the need to recognize milestones in the lives of adults? Perhaps the answer lies in those physically present in mainline denominational congregations today. Richard H. Gentzler gives me pause to think about how we can seek ways to address the adults in our midst: *The church is in the hands of its elders*.

While the popular perception is that the aged are needy and infirm, Gentzler affirms the majority of older adults have plenty to give. The church needs to tap into their wisdom, energy, experience, and talents. Gentzler stresses that older adult ministries need to be by and with elders as well as for them, since participants will represent all stages of retirement and activity levels. In addition to the practical issues of programming, Gentzler takes on more difficult topics of aging including chronic conditions, depression and death. He also recommends that churches pay special attention to the needs of the Boomer generation, since they are now becoming the older adults who will determine the church's path for years to come.

These adults are ones in great need of having personal, trusting relationships in their lives. They need a faith formed by the power of the Holy Spirit. They need to be practicing their faith in the home and we, as the church,

need them to be our sought after and essential Christian adults to pass our faith on to the next generation.

Taking Action

Milestones in the lives of adults are about sad times, happy times, and fearful times. Conversation, prayers, and blessings can be embraced and be a fulfilling time in the lives of adults. Many are struggling to care for aging parents, reinventing their lives after retirement, losing loved ones, and becoming empty nesters.

Marking milestone moments for the entire congregation or for individuals is a step towards replacing programs with relationships. The focus on adults can strengthen the congregation.

Where do you start? I suggest we begin with assessing milestones happening in our congregations by talking with people. Milestones Ministry provides a structure for each milestone. Begin by simply *naming it* and then *equip it* by helping the memorable moment to happen. Next *bless it* with prayer. *Gift it* by thinking of something special to remember the milestone. In the case of one who cares for aging parents or for aging parents, a holding cross or prayer shawl are helpful to not only remember but continue using as faith tools. *Reinforcing it* is important. Revisit the milestone celebrated by helping

someone remember this special time and letting them know they are in prayers.

I look forward to providing examples of congregations embracing and acknowledging milestone moments for adults in our everyday lives through a faith lens in the near future. At this point in time, I have only come across a few that have begun to realize the potential this simple relational ministry tool has to transform the church.

All the ages can be involved when observing milestones for occasions in the life of adults. It is our role modeling through building trusting relationships, praying together, and blessing one another that we feel Christ's presence in our lives. This happens in the congregation and in the home and ensures a living partnership between the two. It begins by taking one step at a time.

Follow them, because they make a path that will lead to a long successful life in the land the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 5:33, CEV)

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Grow-Up Your Church with Intergenerational Ministry

Jim Merhaut

Intergenerationality works for older generations. There is a nursing home in the Netherlands called Humanitas that allows college students to live on campus rent-free in exchange for being neighborly to the elderly residents. The students are required to spend at least 30 hours per month interacting with the residence. There is one rule: *Do not be a nuisance to the elderly residents*. The goal is to take advantage of intergenerational relationship benefits for seniors (Reed, 1). It has been demonstrated that loneliness and isolation correspond with health risks for seniors. The 2012 report of the National Academy of Sciences in the United States reported higher mortality rates for elderly persons who are socially isolated (Steptoe, 1). Experiencing regular and meaningful interactions with younger generations provides significant health benefits to elderly persons living in nursing homes. Holly Allen cites additional studies on the same subject:

Two major issues gerontologists are studying include (1) the effects of age segregation on individuals, and (2) the impact of intergenerational programs on individuals, families and society. Twenty years ago (Sally) Newman noted that the number of age-segregated communities was increasing while interactions among younger and older members of families was decreasing. Newman comments that the outcome of this social phenomenon for the

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for the elderly has been ‘a decline in self-esteem and self-worth, and an increase in feelings of loneliness,’ (*We highlight here that the National Academy of Sciences report referenced above identifies loneliness among the elderly as a likely contributing factor to disease and mortality.*) and for the children and youth, there has been an observed loss of the traditional elder/child nurturing.’ (Allen, 136)

Intergenerationality works for younger generations. Harvard University education professor and researcher, Kurt Fischer, has studied how children respond developmentally on a continuum when they are being prompted and supported by adults versus when they are on their own. The children in his studies display characteristics of earlier developmental stages when adults are not prompting and supporting them and they display more mature characteristics when supportive adults are present and working with them (Fischer, 315-17). The conclusion is that people have a range of maturity within them and the presence of another generation can bring out the growing edge of one’s maturity. Developmental stages are not static. They are dynamic and our movement in them fluctuates from minute to minute depending upon with whom we spend our time and in what setting as well as our emotional disposition. Given the right context of healthy intergenerational relationships, people can excel developmentally far beyond what they can achieve in age-specific peer groups.

What about the Middle Generations?

It is clear that people at the bookends of life, the elderly and the very young, benefit in both physical and psychological ways from being in positive intergenerational relationships. Research presented in this publication has demonstrated this growing truth over and over again. If it is true for the two bookends of life

that intergenerational relationships are beneficial and even necessary for survival, then the next reasonable assumption would be to promote intergenerational relationships at every stage of life.

Immersion in the age-specific subculture begins with the onset of the school years for young children and progresses through adolescence. Children and teens are routinely segmented into age groups for educational, social, and a whole host of other experiences. The comfort of being within one’s generation while excluding other generations reinforces habitual attitudes and behaviors that make it difficult for many people to function effectively with people from other generations. This phenomenon carries well into the adult years. Those who organize these age-specific experiences often point to the stages of developmental psychology to promote the segregation. But, as it turns out, the great developmental theorists of the twentieth century never intended for their stage theories to produce this disjointed result.

There is nothing in the stage theories of Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget, the two dominant developmental theorists of the twentieth century, to suggest that an age-segregated grouping is ideal for either psychosocial development or cognitive development. Those who built upon their work, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, James Fowler, Robert Kegan and others also write extensively about the social context of human development (See Allen, 87-90).

Erikson is most direct in promoting intergenerational interaction with his concept of mutuality. He would say that the generations mutually benefit each other and grow each other up through regular and positive interaction. Adult social maturity is enhanced as much by interaction with children as child maturity is nurtured through interaction with adults.

Piaget’s concept of disequilibrium, or disequibration, also points to the value of intergenerational relationships for cognitive development. People experience disequilibrium when their current cognitive

structures are not developed enough to make meaningful sense of new experiences. Social interaction with people in more developed stages impacts disequilibrium in at least two ways:

1. Interacting socially with those who are older stimulates new experiences and new thinking that challenge one's current structures of thought and behavior.
2. One's world is upset by the experience of new thoughts that are presented through social interaction and one's internal contradictions prompt the development of new ways of thinking and behaving as a means to establish a new equilibrium.

It is not likely that a person will experience disequilibrium simply through the process of aging. It is also less likely to experience disequilibrium while spending time with like-minded individuals. It is social interaction in intergenerational settings that most effectively stimulates this developmental dynamic and promotes maturity.

Robert Kegan of Harvard University currently estimates that only 25% of all adults successfully master the transition into self-authoring adult consciousness and only about 1% develop beyond that level. One wonders if more deliberate and meaningful intergenerational interaction might increase these percentages.

Congregational Practices to Grow Up Your Church

What would happen to your church and the community beyond your church if you deliberately promoted intergenerational conversations in a wide variety of ministry settings? Is it possible to promote human and spiritual development by bringing the generations together to grow each other up? Would a more mature congregation be a more

powerful influence on the surrounding community?

Creating opportunities for intergenerational conversations and other expressions of caring is one way to harness the power of mutuality. When the generations take time for each other to express care through dialogue, everyone benefits by taking significant steps towards the next developmental chapters in their lives. Church leaders can both create the conditions for spontaneous intergenerational conversation and they can also deliberately plan for intergenerational conversations and design them in such a way that they are caring expressions that build up the body of Christ.

Share the Vision

No secrets! Proclaim this vision from the rooftops! When your church decides to deliberately promote intergenerational interaction, tell the people that is what you are doing. And tell them why. Give your congregation a glimpse of the vision and explain in the clearest possible terms why this new vision is beneficial for everyone.

There are theological reasons why you are promoting intergenerationality. We are created in the image of a triune God. Without deep bonds of personal connection with each other, we fall short of that image.

There are biblical reasons why you are promoting intergenerationality. The Hebrew people were a full intergenerational community in relationship to the God who called them out of Egypt. All were called and all were present for key moments in the Bible. Jesus taught in the presence of men, women and children, and when some adults tried to usher the children out of sight, Jesus vehemently objected and reminded his followers that their presence is essential if we are to grow in our understanding of the kingdom of God.

Here are some key passages for your consideration:

- Deuteronomy 6:9—Teach your children.
- Deuteronomy 29:10-12—The whole community enters into covenant with God.
- Joshua 8:34-35—All of what Moses taught is passed on to the men, women, and children together.
- Psalm 78:1-8—Whole generations pass on the faith to the following generations.
- Isaiah 11:6-9—On God's holy mountain, those who are naturally different shall come together, and the young are a paradigm for hope.
- Jeremiah 1:4-10—No one is too young to be a messenger for God.
- Joel 2:15-16—The whole community is called to fast.
- Malachi 3:22-24—The Old Testament closes with a call for parents and children to turn their hearts toward each other.
- Mark 10:13-16—Jesus affirms the presence of children in the midst of adults as a special sign of the kingdom of God. How can adults come to know God's kingdom without regular contact with children?
- Matthew 18:1-5—Jesus is teaching in an intergenerational setting and uses a child as a visual reminder of the disposition necessary for salvation.
- Matthew 14 and 15—Jesus teaches with whole families present (see 14:21 and 15:38).
- Acts 16:25-34—Paul and Silas baptize a prison guard and his entire household together in his home. (See also Acts 16:14-15 for a similar example.)
- Acts 20:7-12 and Acts 21:5-6—Paul teaches and leads prayer with young and old present together.

There are sociological and developmental reasons why you are promoting inter-generationality. Some of these reasons were cited above, but other research findings can be referenced as well in your communication of

the vision. For example, Pamela Cooper-White outlines numerous theories that connect language acquisition with power structures in society. She notes that privileged children learn the language of the dominant culture through the conversations they experience with parents and others who represent the most powerful people in their culture. Poor children learn the language of poverty through their experiences of conversations with their parents and other adults who are trapped in the cycle of poverty. These formational conversations are highly predictive of the developmental patterns that will shape the lives of these children and reinforce the developmental trajectories of the adults (Kelcourse, 104-05).

By creating intergenerational conversation in your congregation, you provide children and adults with opportunities to learn a broader language. They expand their vocabularies beyond the limited one that they receive in their households. They develop habits of inquiry into the lives of those who are different from themselves and that inquiry opens up an abundance of developmental possibilities. This model could become a foundation for broader cross-cultural conversations.

Share this vision in multiple ways. Write a series of short essays that explain the inadequacies of your current approach to ministry, clearly paint the vision for the future, and begin to hint at some simple strategies for taking steps towards the vision. The essays can be published in a number of ways: church bulletin, website, email, podcast, and more.

Create Intergenerational Recreation Programs

Break the ice that separates the generations. Enjoyable recreational activities are a regular part of church life. Most of these activities are limited to age-specific groups. The seniors group has their Bocce league. The youth group has their volleyball league. The mom's group has their craft days. Why not occasionally

invite other generations to participate in these existing age-specific activities? Or you can develop entirely new recreational activities that consist of teams representing the various generations. Begin with age-specific teams competing against teams that represent other generations. Over time, after the ice is broken, you can experiment with intergenerational teams.

Weave Conversations into Existing Programs and Ministries

Make a list of the programs and ministries that include multiple generations. There may be simple opportunities to create conversation across the generations that are being missed. For example, if you have a service experience that includes more than one generation, you could process the experience by deliberately creating intergenerational groupings for the process conversations.

Worship provides another opportunity to mix the generations. There is no law that says a homily or a sermon must exclude conversation among the church participants. The whole community is present on Sunday, which provides an excellent opportunity for intergenerational interaction. Build a simple discussion question into your homily/sermon from time to time and invite any children in the church to share their answers with at least two adults: a parent and a non-parent. The adults can also share their answers with the children.

Promote Intergenerational Storytelling

There are many Bible stories that have open endings. Invite each generation to write an ending to the story from the perspective of their own generation. Then mix the generations to share their endings. Add another twist by inviting the generations to write an ending from the perspective of the generation that either precedes them or

follows them. Here are some stories to consider:

- The book of Jonah ends with a question. How would a child respond in action to this question? a teen? an adult?
- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). How would this story end for the older brother if he were a child? a teen? an adult?
- The Rich Young Man (Matthew 19:16-22) (See also Luke 18:18-23). How would this story end for the young man if he were a child? a teen? an adult?
- The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-9). After being determined to pass judgment, how would Jesus' actions impact a child who dropped a stone and walked away? a teen? an adult?

Reading Emotions Activity

Emotional intelligence is a key predictor of success in relationship and in life in general. Intergenerational experiences are especially powerful in promoting emotional intelligence because children take their cues from the emotional complexity of the adults who nurture them. This activity will help promote emotional intelligence in the context of Bible learning:

- Using any video series that depicts Bible stories, show the video without sound.
- Pause the video when a key emotion is being expressed on a character's face and ask the participants to identify how the character is feeling at this moment.
- Invite each generation to interpret the emotion in age-specific groups.
- Mix the generations to discuss their interpretations.
- Show the clip again with sound and see if the dialogue inspires any changes in the participants' interpretations.

- Continue the process with various emotional expressions.

Conclusion

Intergenerational relationships are essential for human development and for a full experience of church. Churches are not clubs that bring people together with common interests and identities. The church is the Body of Christ and thrives on diversity. The church plays a unique role in our culture as an organization that deliberately brings together all ages and all generations with a common mission. By bringing the generations together, we assist in the process of growing everyone up. We promote developmental maturity in both psychological and spiritual ways and we express our growth in service to each other and to the community beyond the church.

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Digital Media for Ministry *Brief*: Stewardship & Fundraising

Kyle Matthew Olive

This is the final in a series of three briefs about digital media for ministry in areas other than faith formation. Because the official or de facto job descriptions of many faith formation ministers are growing as church staffs shrink, I believe it is important for readers of this publication to have at least a cursory knowledge of how other areas of congregational life are changing, and how technology enters into that change. We may even catch

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a glimpse of how new media offer hope and new life to those who use these tools thoughtfully to improve the cultural effectiveness of their ministries.

This issue's brief will cover digital tools for stewardship and giving. Of the three topics in this series (we began with communications/evangelism and continued to organizational/community life), this is the area in which I have the least expertise. But the research I've done suggests that I may not be alone. Indeed, the impact of technology on giving does not seem to be a topic of discussion in most of the well-established centers of stewardship conversation in our churches.

Thus, I am especially grateful to the students in the digital media for ministry class I've been teaching this spring at Virginia Theological Seminary. Representing contact with dozens of congregations, their responses to my informal survey suggested some trends, emerging practices, and places to look for further information.

Big Picture: Diversify Channels, Specify Impact

Matters of money are a significant struggle for many if not most congregations. As a group, church people are not very comfortable talking about money and its meaning, hence the avoidance of fundraising committees and the dread around fall stewardship sermons. The anxiety may be related to the significant budgetary struggles in most churches. For example, the Faith Communities Today study reported that only 42% of congregations considered their financial health to be good or excellent; the rest fell on the spectrum between "in serious difficulty" and "tight, but we manage" (8). It's true that this research was conducted in 2010, when the fallout from the financial crisis was still particularly virulent. But at least one other study suggests the effects have lingered and may only now be beginning to abate (LifeWay, 5).

However, there's plenty of good news in the story of church giving. Nonprofit fundraising strategist Mark Rovner reports that fully 41% of American adults support places of worship. Matures, Boomers, and Gen Xers named faith communities their "priority cause" at higher rates than they did for any other charity recipient (46%, 38%, and 36%, respectively). Millennials prioritized only children's charities at a higher rate, 29%, compared to 22% for places of worship (Rovner, 10-11). By and large, the people in our congregations *want* to support the church and its mission.

As I read Rovner's analysis of the ways they prefer to do that, I see two trends that seem likely to have a significant impact sooner than we might think, especially if economic opportunity for the younger generations begins to improve:

1. Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of various kinds of electronic giving increases as donor age decreases. The oldest adults are the least likely to give online. But we *did* see statistically significant growth in online giving by Baby Boomers between 2010 and 2013 (to a level of 42%), so churches should not delay in diversifying beyond envelopes for the offering plate. As Rovner puts it: "multichannel is the new normal" in nonprofit fundraising (5).
2. As donor age decreases, the prevalence of this question increases: "How is my money actually making a difference?" (Rovner, 13). Of course, no technology will relieve us of the hard work of making a positive case for giving and its impact, and it will continue to be difficult to get people excited about making a gift simply "to keep the lights on." But the trend toward greater concern about impact does suggest that the project-based approach that drives most crowdfunding sites (Kickstarter, Indiegogo, etc.) could be a way to get

younger givers more involved in ministry financing.

I believe that diversifying available giving options (for both monthly and spontaneous givers) and experimenting with crowdfunding tools are smart investments. Most of the rest of this article will survey tools that help make these goals a reality. But remember these are mostly tactical issues and need to be part of a wise stewardship plan and strategy. There are tons of great resources for the latter. I find the financial section in James Berkley's *Leadership Handbook of Management & Administration* to be particularly helpful, though I do not always agree with the theological approach of all its contributors.

Tool Profiles: Three Essential Tasks

For Pledging: Basic Tools for Dedicated Monthly Givers

Of the digital media for ministry students I surveyed, roughly a third said an online tools was involved in their regular church giving. Some of them give monthly via auto-debit or PayPal, and a couple made their pledge commitment online but continue to drop their checks in the collection plate. You will perhaps not be surprised to hear that I was one of the people who reported giving online. In fact, I suspect I am far from unique among Millennials in wishing I could never write a paper check again. And don't underestimate "the pull of paperless" among Xers and even Boomers.

Churches that wish to add online giving tools suitable for regular payments have two basic routes available. One option is to do what any online business would do and register for some sort of merchant services account. Some of the better known options include Paypal and Stripe, though there are many others. These allow you to accept payments via credit and debit cards. The going

rate for fees seems to be 2.9% plus \$0.30 per transaction, though large churches may be able to secure a high-volume discount.

Percentage-based payment processing is a non-starter for some churches, regardless of the convenience of credit and debit card payments ("why pay 3% in fees when our budget is already tight?"). In that case, a scaled down online giving solution is to accept ACH (Automated Clearing House, aka e-check or auto-debit) payments only. ACH payments tend to have a smaller, flat fee in the \$0.25-75 range. Some payment processors will allow you to offer both ACH and card processing, in which case it's worth explaining to your members what the financial difference is and the benefit of the e-check option.

The problem with simple merchant services accounts is that the vendors who provide them don't specialize in serving churches. There are peculiarities involved in church giving: we have much higher rates of dedicated monthly giving/pledging than your average nonprofit, and many of us use similar tools for managing our member records (ACS being the most popular among churches I interact with). So rather than seeking out a generic merchant account, you might instead choose an "end-to-end" solution from one of the software companies that create payment products just for churches.

Dedicated online giving tools for churches include eGive, easyTithe, and the online giving module in The City product from ACS. These tools build in knowledge of typical church financial management workflows and help you secure payment processing rates that are more in line with the needs of a small nonprofit.

Whether you go with straightforward merchant services or an end-to-end church giving platform, be sure to do some comparison shopping, and consider these questions along the way:

- How well will this tool integrate with our existing procedure for processing gifts?

- How much time and money will it take to get our staff and volunteers trained to use the new tool?
- What is the likely impact of monthly service fees and individual transaction fees on our net revenue?
- What is this vendor's track record of serving churches or small nonprofits?
- *In short, is this the right tool for the online giving needs of our community?*

For the Plate: Convenient Tools for Giving on the Go

A church of my acquaintance recently complained that a well-attended, neighborhood-oriented evening worship service produced a lower-than-expected freewill offering. We wondered if we needed to do a better job of “church culture” translation and financial transparency, perhaps posting a suggested minimum donation by the door with an explanation that the offering from this service helps pay for many more throughout the year.

I believe that idea could bear fruit, but I do not think it gets to the core problem, which is not lack of generosity. Let's talk about another interesting result from my small and informal church giving survey. Although the class skews young, I believe it is particularly important to heed the warning of this stark result: fully two thirds of the students said they “rarely carry cash.” If the “plate” part of our pledge and plate income has been shrinking, I think it highly likely that a major reason is that fewer and fewer people reliably carry cash or a checkbook. I do not have hard data to support this conjecture, and I'm not entirely sure how one would go about making the measurement. But I hope more churches will take the plunge and experiment with ways to support spontaneous giving at church events through kiosks and card readers.

Already we are seeing a trend toward offering plate tokens that allow monthly givers to place an “I gave online” note in the offering plate, thus claiming their part in the corporate

sacramental action of the offertory. What if our pews also had tear-away cards that read, “I will give by credit card at the end of the service”? Half the card could go in the offering plate; the other would be a reminder to follow through with payment.

How about the act of giving itself? That part has gotten easier and easier. Some churches are installing free-standing kiosks, a kind of reverse-ATM with a touch screen that can walk a would-be giver through a debit or credit card donation. I wonder if a mobile card reader administered by a church volunteer might be an even better approach, since it has more potential to be relational (I'd rather be thanked by a person than a confirmation screen). Mobile payment company Square offers free readers that can turn any iOS or Android device into a virtual cash register. Again, the processing fee approaches 3%, but remember that 97% of \$0 is still \$0.

In this same spirit, another trend to watch is the spread of near-field communication (NFC) technology. This payment method works by having a chip in your phone communicate directly with the vendor register. Apple and Google are hoping that it will allow their users to replace their physical credit cards with virtual equivalents controlled by apps like Apple Pay and Google Wallet. If the trend takes off, we'll be complaining not that people no longer carry cash but that they no longer carry any form of physical payment. Presumably an accessible NFC equivalent of Square's mobile card reader would not be far behind.

Here's one final piece to the mobile-giving puzzle in an increasingly cashless world: I don't yet know any small mainline churches using it, but church-oriented payments company Kindrid is addressing the problems we've been discussing in an interesting and (I think) unique way. Their philosophy is that “making giving easier increases generosity.” That sounds right to me, and their system makes giving as easy as sending a text to your church's “giving number.”

The first time you do so, you'll receive a link to a secure online form for entering your

debit or credit card info. After that, one text is all it takes to give. Kindrid claims to be structured in such a way that as the tool gains popularity, the benefits will be shared with all users (presumably a lowering of the current 2.5% transaction fee, for instance).

What makes this approach appealing to me is the way it could be connected to special offerings. Imagine hearing a sermon or presentation about a new outreach project in need of church support. Now imagine being given a keyword to add to your text message to designate it for that project in real time. By the end of the sermon or presentation, I could be one of dozens of people who have already contributed by sending a simple text message with a dollar amount and a keyword. The monthly service fees for Kindrid aren't cheap—they start at \$45 per month. But I hope the potential for a church with a good stewardship plan and a moderately tech-savvy congregation is obvious.

For Projects: Crowdfunding Tools for Mission-Driven Giving

Speaking of special offerings, I wrote in the introduction about the problem of impact, about how lots of people (especially young people) want to know about and influence how their gift will be used. This is, of course, a well-studied problem in church stewardship, and many experts believe special offerings and designated giving are powerful tools if based in a discerning, policy-driven framework (Berkley, 472-475; 449-500).

There's something of this insight baked into crowdfunding tools like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and Crowdrise, which help you harness online connections to raise money online. People give to these campaigns (in small and large amounts) because they want to see the projects succeed. They want to be a part of the mission. Churches, judicatories, mission teams, and spiritual entrepreneurs are starting to dip their toes into these waters, and I can't wait to see the results as we begin to

learn how fundraising lessons from successful crowdfunders translate into church contexts.

If you've got a project that would lend itself to a video pitch and an online campaign, Google one or more of these campaigns to see concrete examples of faithful crowdfunding in action:

- "No . . . where are you FROM?"—A Book on Race: Bruce Reyes-Chow on Kickstarter
- On The Block Outreach: Church of St. Luke in the Fields on Crowdrise
- St. Lydia's Dinner Church: Emily Scott on Indiegogo
- "Who Are You, Jesus?" A Bible and Prayer App for Children: Suzanne Haraburd on Kickstarter

(Full disclosure: I know about these fundraisers because I'm somehow connected with them. In particular, I have contributed to Haraburd's and St. Luke's campaigns—the latter from the pew on a Sunday morning!)

Bottom Line: Harness the Generosity of Members and Friends

Let me repeat in concluding what I said at the beginning of this article: I am not a stewardship expert. But I work in a church and visit and advise many others. I am convinced that, perhaps more than in any other area of church life, our congregations get themselves in money trouble by reinventing the wheel, by failing to ask for help, and by lagging behind broader cultural practice. Technology is changing how we track and spend our money, and embedded in those changes are opportunities for churches to fund their mission and, yes, even their maintenance in creative and effective ways.

If you are considering offering online donations, exploring mobile giving, or crowdfunding a mission initiative, I hope this article gives you the lay of the land and some

good questions to ask. I also hope it will inspire you to seek out other churches and teams that have made some of these transitions successfully. Money is so important to the effectiveness of our communities. We all need to take a deep breath and commit to talking about it theologically, practically, and with as little fear as possible.

If you need a little encouragement, remember the conviction that underlies so much of the work of the ministers and technologists in this article: the people we serve have within them the abiding presence of God's love, a presence that leads them into ever-greater commitment to loving service and sacrificial giving. If we remove as many barriers as possible and invite people to regular missional and financial reflection, we will see the fruit of this spirit of generosity. That's not a naive "prosperity gospel" message.

It's a theology of stewardship grounded by faith in a savior who commissions us for mission—and wasn't afraid to talk about to talk about the thing that helps us pay for it.

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Faith Formation in a Missional Age—Continuing the Conversation

Diane E. Shallue

Like falling in love, coming to believe in the good news of Jesus Christ is a mystery. Despite many years of serving in the area of Christian education in several congregations, I am still in awe of the process of faith formation, a growth that often happens unseen—like seeds sprouting underground, nourished by the Holy Spirit. In Volume 7.4 of the *Lifelong Faith Journal* Terri Elton wrote an article, “Faith Formation in a Missional Age.” (Go to <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html> for the issue.) This article provides a second perspective on faith formation in a missional age. I hope to provide some thoughts to continue the conversation on the process of faith formation.

In part one of her article, Elton described Christian faith as a gift from God, an embodied faith with a personal and communal identity rooted in faith in God that exists in the midst of a broken world. She noted how the world in which Christians find themselves has changed, becoming religiously pluralistic with Christianity no longer supported by civil society to the degree that it was in the past. The language of Christian faith is foreign to many. Christians cannot assume

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that school systems or business systems will reinforce a Christian lifestyle. As Elton reviewed these changes, she thought that two elements will be critical: revisiting our view of faith and exploring what it means to be a gathered and sent people.

How can congregational leaders move forward in these two areas? I hope to explore some possible paths for congregations who are passionate about growing faithful Christians.

In the past, church leaders created Christian education programs modeled after public schools with students divided into age specific groups with emphasis on lecture, rote learning, and writing. The Sunday School movement began in England in the 1700's to teach children who often worked in factories how to read. Classes were held on Sunday as it was the only day most children did not work. It was missional in its early configuration, reaching out to children in the community. Over time as public schools became compulsory for most students, the purpose of Sunday School changed with a stronger focus on religious and moral training. Eventually age specific groups with graded curriculum like in the public school became the standard to which all congregations aspired, even those with no paid program staff. To parents, a valid proper Sunday School program was run by paid staff with parents reduced to a supporting role. Over time the schooling/ instructional model became the primary model of Christian education. If attendance dropped or children were not engaged, better curriculum or improved teaching methods were seen as the solution.

Several writers in the past called attention to the problem of relying on the schooling/ instructional model as the primary mode of faith formation. Although they wrote many years ago, their comments and work are still valid and can provide insight into the problems we are currently facing. In 1976 John Westerhoff stated, "I contend that we have become victimized by this schooling-instructional understanding of religious education and imprisoned by its implications. As long as it informs our labors, significant

alternatives will have difficulty becoming born or sustained" (7). The Search Institute did a study on Effective Christian Education which was published in 1990. Eugene Roehlkepartain quotes from that research, "Christian education in a majority of congregations is a tired enterprise in need of reform. Often out-of-touch with adult and adolescent needs, it experiences increasing difficulty in finding and motivating volunteers, faces general disinterest among its 'clients,' and employs models and procedures that have changed little over time" (19-20). Roehlkepartain goes on to say, "There appears to be a widespread assumption that Christian education is about new knowledge and children. And until we shift our thinking to understand Christian education as 'discovering what it means to be a Christian in this time and place,' it is unlikely that Christian education will be central to the life of the church" (191). As they indicate, the schooling/instructional model adopted from the public school system did not fit well with the needs of faith formation even in the 1970's. The challenge to keep children and youth involved and interested in programs based on a school/instructional model continues.

Changing Culture

During the twenty year period from 1990 to 2010, the number of children enrolled in Lutheran (ELCA) Sunday School ministries decreased from 1,007,774 to 400,375. That is roughly a decline of 61% (Buegler). As attendance in Sunday Schools dropped in the 1970's and as young people drifted away from the church, building caring relationships with youth in separate programs was seen as the key to vitality in a church. Hiring the right person, especially one trained in youth and family ministry to relate to youth and to create fun and interesting programs for youth became the preferred solution. Many congregations thought that a good youth ministry program would attract or keep families with youth and children.

This approach also had its problems. It not only separated the faith formation of children and youth from adults, it also fostered an attractional view of children, youth, and family ministry, reinforcing the prevailing cultural consumerism mindset. The following quote clarifies the difference in an attractional view and a missional view. “The *attractional* church is generally defined as a congregation that advertises heavily and focuses its programs on bringing people into the church building, where they will hear the gospel preached. It is, therefore, *attracting* people to church. The missional church is seen as a congregation that is not focused on attracting people to the building, but one that goes out into the community and does good deeds in the name of Christ.” (Williams)

Kenda Creasy Dean in her book, *Almost Christian* states, “When we isolate youth and children’s ministries from the larger church, we take away their opportunity to see mature Christian adults in action. We take away their role models. We take away their opportunity to see why faith matters to us, and how and why we worship God... For the church to be in the apprenticeship business, we must place children and youth in close relationships with mature Christian adults who can show them the way.” (Kirk) Rather than isolating youth and children from the rest of the life of the congregation, they need to be nurtured and guided within a faithful community by authentic adults. Vibrant Faith Ministries emphasizes the need for youth to interact with adults who are authentic, available and affirming. In order to “catch” the faith, youth and children need opportunities to interact with faithful adults.

Like many others, I see problems with the way Christian education and youth ministry were done in the past. Over time youth ministry has morphed into youth and family ministry with a focus on involvement of parents and then into children, youth and family ministry attempting to draw in the parents of younger children. Research has found that parents are the primary influence in the faith development of their children. The

home has a greater role than the congregation in shaping the faith of children and youth. But the reality is that parents often have difficulty connecting spiritually with their kids and need help on how to model the Christian faith. Many of today’s parents do not have much experience in worship or prayer or Bible study or even talking about faith which would help them in guiding their children. They need support from the congregation so that they can truly be the primary teachers of faith.

We will need new assumptions, new models, clearer definitions and common understandings to invigorate faith formation in a missional age.

How can we support faith formation so that it can flourish, especially in a rapidly changing world? Imagination, conversation, creativity, collaboration and experimentation are needed as we move forward in this conversation.

What Is Faith Formation?

Faith gives meaning and purpose to life. It gets us up in the morning and energizes our lives. Elton in her article outlined four dimensions of faith.

1. Faith as a mysterious gift from God.
2. Faith as compass which informs Christians as they live in the world and make decisions.
3. Faith as witness in relationship with the community.
4. Faith as agent which informs, forms and transforms individuals and communities through the Holy Spirit.

Faith is lived out in community, passing from person to person through the power of the Holy Spirit. Relationships with God and with each other are necessary. Many times it is said that faith is more caught than taught. Several places in the Bible disciples are told to “Love the Lord your God with all our heart, and with all our soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12: 29-31;

Luke 10: 27). Loving our neighbors flows from the love of God. Faith is a gift from God. Faith formation is a process of forming and informing that faith, engaging the head and the heart. If we only attend to one or the other, faith will be stunted.

Faith formation is nurtured by the whole life of a congregation, the gathered community of faithful people. Maria Harris in *Fashion Me A People*, says that a church does not have a curriculum but that it is the curriculum. Everything that happens in a congregation is part of the process of faith formation. The Exemplary Youth Ministry Study notes, it is “the spirit and culture” of a congregation which creates the sweet spot for faith formation among youth. I think this is true for all generations, not just the youth.

Faith Formation and Christian Education

Faith formation is different than the term “Christian education.” The focus of Christian education is narrower with an emphasis on teaching and learning. Learning styles, multiple intelligences, teaching methods and age level characteristics are all elements of the field of Christian education. Teaching is an intentional activity to help people find meaning in a chaotic often despairing world. The Lutheran tradition has a rich history of teaching and learning going back to the creation of the Small Catechism by Martin Luther for parents to use to teach children in the home. The teaching and learning process happens between people of all ages and like faith formation is fundamentally relational. The emphasis in children, youth and family ministries on the relational aspects of faith formation provide a correction to the past emphasis in Christian education on the schooling model. Faith formation is learning embedded in community. The content of the faith, a core of knowledge, is best transmitted when people are already in relationship. People learn in different ways, at different times, in different contexts and at different

stages of life but learning is lifelong. Christian education provides knowledge about stages of learning in order to promote faith formation throughout life.

Now we are in a digital age which provides new opportunities and new methods to build these relationships between people. Learning can be diffuse, broad, informal, and happen around the clock. Christian education by using digital tools can point to new ways to learn and connect. These new digital tools provide new opportunities to dialogue around meaning and purpose which is the basis of our spirituality. They provide new ways to listen to the types of questions being asked. Digital media can enhance, support and enrich face to face relationships which are key for transformational Christian education.

In contrast with Christian education, faith formation is broader and encompasses all aspects of the life of a congregation including but not limited to worship, mission trips, service, and casual conversations. Moving to a more robust understanding of faith formation is required in order for the church to thrive in a missional age.

New Models

As we move to think about new models of Christian education, beyond the old schooling/ instructional model to more of a focus on faith formation, a former Christian educator can give us some direction. John Westerhoff in *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (1976, 2000) lists four aspects of educational ministries that need to be emphasized:

1. Concern for feeling as well as thinking with an emphasis on participation in the arts.
2. Development of a historical awareness not just a collection of dates, names and places.
3. Focus on stories: “Storytelling needs to become a natural and central part of church life, and we must learn to tell

God's story as *our* story (Westerhoff, 71).

4. Faith is best revealed in our actions.

Westerhoff uses the context of a faith community as the environment for Christian education that transforms and goes beyond memorizing facts, Bible verses or the *Small Catechism*. In his update in 2000, he outlines six particular characteristics which provide a context for Christian nurture.

1. a common story
2. a common authority to hold us together when we differ
3. common rituals around which to celebrate and order its life
4. a common life that is more like a familial community than an institution
5. lives for an end beyond itself and its own survival with a commitment to a common end which binds it together
6. values diversity (Westerhoff, 74-75)

I think that several elements are key as we move into a missional age—intentionally integrated rituals and faith practices for all ages, story and fostering conversation among the generations, and diversity. Let us focus first on faith practices.

Faith Practices

An emphasis on faith practices is being promoted in the ELCA through several initiatives. The Practicing Discipleship Initiative by the Youth Ministry Network promotes various faith practices by training youth and adult leaders in each synod. The ELCA Churchwide Faith Practices Initiative emphasizes *Living Our Baptismal Covenant* by encouraging individuals and faith communities to see the baptismal covenant not only as a thorough description of our lifelong journey with God, but also to see the covenant as a lens to examine how to practice the faith. It states, "Our baptism sets us out on a lifelong journey that is characterized by our

relationship to God, our relationship to our faith community, our relationships with various parts of our neighborhood and community, and our relationship to the wider world. The baptismal covenant describes this lifelong journey with God. Then the question arises, "How do we live out this lifelong journey with God?" Faith practices are the means by which we journey with God throughout our lives, shaping our behavior which in turn shapes our belief and our attitudes.

How can we rethink some of our existing ministry programs and activities through the lens of faith practices?

In February 2014 at the Faith Formation Summit held in St. Louis, MO, thirty key leaders in faith formation in the ELCA were asked which faith practices were most important in faith development. Prayer was listed as the number one faith practice with worship and service listed second. So if we are looking for new models to provide an environment in which the Holy Spirit can work, providing fertile ground in which the seeds of faith can grow, we need to consider ways to encourage people to pray, worship and serve.

Prayer can be done alone or in groups. It is naturally intergenerational as we pray together and for others. An intentional focus on prayer might be a transforming experience for the whole congregation.

- How can prayer become a vibrant language of our congregations?
- How might children and youth be drawn into the prayer life of the faith community?
- Who are the people who pray regularly in your congregation?

Rethinking **worship** as an intentional opportunity for faith formation is another possible avenue. Movement in worship engages the body and the mind. Processions give opportunity for all ages to participate. Image rich worship spaces invite imagination and wondering with the

use of art, banners, symbols, colors, and sculpture. Westerhoff says, "Ritual must always be at the heart of Christian education, for in the community's liturgy, story and action merge; in worship we remember and we act in symbolic ways which bring our sacred tradition and our lives together, providing us with both meaning and motivation for daily existence. That is why, if our children are to have faith, they must worship with us." (58) Worship is a key element of faith formation and worship planners need to be aware of its powerful influence despite the challenges of irregular attendance, biblically illiteracy and short attention spans. All ages can and should worship together.

- How can worship engage children and youth?
- How can seekers and those unfamiliar with Christian rituals and language be engaged in worship?

Service is the third key element for faith formation. When the body is engaged, so is the mind. Faith based reflection turns a service project into a faith formation practice. When conversation about values, spirituality and God is part of the service project, then transformation can occur.

- How might opportunities for service be moments to reflect on faith in action?

Through these faith practices of prayer, worship and service identity is shaped and faith is formed. Using faith practices as an element in new models for faith formation can help the church be more missional.

What Is Missional?

The word, "missional," has been used frequently in Lutheran circles in the last several years. Elton in her paper looked at the challenges of a missional age, outlining how the culture no longer supports Christian values, as the church lives into a minority

position. Secular society no longer supports the work and mission of the church. In fact, it is often opposed to the values and viewpoint of the church and its message.

So what does it mean to be "missional?" Stephen Bouman defines "mission of the church" as God's reconciling and restoring action in the world" (3). He says that being missional involves three great listenings: 1) listening to God, 2) listening to the church, and 2) listening to the world around us. (91)

Listening to stories and sharing stories makes room for the Holy Spirit and the process of faith development. As we tell stories, we shape our identities as Christians and make meaning for our lives. Often when the story of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 is read, the emphasis is on the disciples speaking in many languages in verse 4. But in verse 8, there is an emphasis on hearing (see Acts 2: 8-11) as people from many nations are able to hear the disciples speaking in their language. Was this then a miracle of speaking or a miracle of hearing? Listening well provides space for diversity and allows us to walk as companions together in faith. Intentional listening is a move to being missional.

Story and Mission

Besides listening, telling stories is a movement out into the world. As we listen and tell stories, we connect to each other. When we listen closely, we wonder and ask questions. Questions like stories draw people into conversation, setting them on a common journey and building a relationship. Questions and stories move people from antagonism to caring. Telling stories invites participation and builds community. As the people of God know the biblical story, they can relate that sacred story to their own personal story. The Book of Faith initiative emphasizes adults knowing the biblical story and seeing it through a particularly Lutheran lens. Personal stories are connected to the story of how God works in the world through people who are called and

sent. Connecting our stories to God's story is a natural way of forming faith.

Another ELCA initiative related to storytelling is Story Matters. "Through Story Matters, congregations are invited to participate in a conversation that centers on the one biblical story that they identify for themselves as their defining story. . . . The hope is that extensive engagement with their chosen passage will help the congregation to form their identity as a missional community, to deepen their practice of faith, and to live out their specific vocation as a called and sent community of disciples."

- How can you link the personal stories of members of your congregation with God's story?
- How can you grow opportunities for story sharing in your congregation?
- What opportunities do you have to share and listen to each other's stories?

The Challenge of Ethnic Diversity

We can use the connections between stories and mission to tackle the challenges of diversity. I recently read a newspaper article on how U.S. schools have more minority students, to the point that they are now the majority. "For the first time ever, U.S. public schools are projected this fall to have more minority students than non-Hispanic whites enrolled, a shift largely fueled by growth in the number of Hispanic children. Non-Hispanic white students are still expected to be the largest racial group in the public schools this year at 49.8 percent. But the National Center for Education Statistics says minority students, when added together, will now make up the majority." (Hefling)

Dr. Nelson Strobert, an African-American professor emeritus at Gettysburg Seminary and Dr. Eddie Kwok, an Asian-American professor in Saskatoon, Canada, discuss how the Bible is interpreted from the particular viewpoint of their ethnic group in *Teaching the Bible, Hosting the Conversation*, a DVD resource

from SELECT Learning produced through the Book of Faith Initiative. Their insights will be useful as the ELCA attempts to reach out to groups conventionally considered "minorities."

Dr. Anne Wimberly in her book, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* provides a cross-generational orientation to linking stories of family identities, events, and relationships with biblical stories and exemplary faith stories from the lives of African Americans. Ethnic diversity involves different priorities and values, different ways of interpreting Biblical stories, and difference in types of preferred music as well as differences in decision making. We need to have mutual respect for these differences and consider how we can listen to each other as we tell our stories. Telling stories is important for children and youth as well as adults. It could be a crucial element in new models of faith formation.

Some great questions related to reading and interpreting the Bible are found in the book, *Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*: 1) How is my reading of the Bible affected by my cultural lenses?; 2) Which passages, doctrines, stories or themes may I have overlooked? Which have I tended to overemphasize?; and 3) At which points have the values of my culture clashed with those of the gospel?

"If I belong to a given culture and am ministering to people who, for the most part, share the same culture, we may together be essentially blind to how the culture is affecting our perspective" (Conde-Franzier, Kang, and Pratt, 128) When we listen to each other carefully and tell our stories, we begin to understand each other and see how God is working in different ways in our cultural contexts.

The Challenge of Generational Differences

Generational differences often make it difficult for people to hear each other's stories. There are differences between the age groups in

styles of preferred music, ways to communicate and decisions on how to use money. Older adults grew up with an emphasis on deferred pleasure. Money in the bank was seen as security and not spent easily. Sameness was emphasized, valued and assumed. One's spirituality was tied to a physical space like a particular religious building, or a sanctuary with a particular arrangement. Gil Rendle calls this a "spirituality of place." A spirituality of place has a settled nature that encourages on-going traditions in which certain objects always have the same place, particularly around holidays or yearly special events. Those with a spirituality of place emphasize belonging, the importance of being part of a group and going along with the group. Individual preferences are downplayed. These attitudes create an emphasis on doing things the same way.

Contrast these views with those of younger generations who perceive the role of a religious institution differently than older generations. Younger Christians have been shaped by the consumer value system with its emphasis on instant gratification, individual orientation, and assumption of difference. Younger adults see money as a tool to be used and spent. They are mobile in their living arrangements, in their relationships, and in their connections to a congregation. In their view, individuals, not communities, are the primary negotiators of value and meaning. According to Gil Rendle, younger adults have a "spirituality of journey." When one assumes that spirituality is a journey, it is easy to move when a congregation has conflict or does not satisfy. Raised in a consumer-orientated society, life is a marketplace and shopping around is the way one creates a lifestyle of meaning. A spirituality of journey does not have one special sacred place where God can be found. Belonging looks different when spiritually is seen as journey. Younger adults might attend several different congregations because each congregation meets a different need which is very confusing to older adults.

In addition, organized religious groups are negatively viewed among many young adults.

There is the suspicion that churches will be judgmental about life-style choices and eager to get your money. Those with positive views often think of church as a nice but quaint place to go on Christmas and Easter to hear great music but not a community to which one might want to belong. These viewpoints influence belief and impact worship attendance and membership. In order to truly listen across the generational divides, one needs to have some understanding of these generational differences.

Listening and Sharing

As we move away from thinking about faith formation as the schooling/instructional model, we also move away from an emphasis on lecture, on telling and on being the authority. Instead we walk along with others as they discover and live out faith. We gather as a community around a shared story, God's story of salvation.

Two diagrams from Parker Palmer's book, *The Courage to Teach* show two different approaches to the process of teaching and learning (100, 102). These visual representations of the two approaches drive home the point that lecture by the expert pastor is not always an effective faith formation technique.

The first approach has an expert who knows the object (God or God's story) and tells the others what he knows. All the information flows one way. There is no mutual listening, no community, only a hierarchical dispensation of information. The second diagram shows a community of people who wish to know or learn gathered around a subject (God or God's story). Everyone is in relationship with each other and with the subject at the center of the network.

Everyone is listening, all voices have equal value, and everyone shares, thereby, creating a learning community that integrates faith formation into all aspects of life together. It is a way of learning and teaching where people are transformed rather than a hierarchical

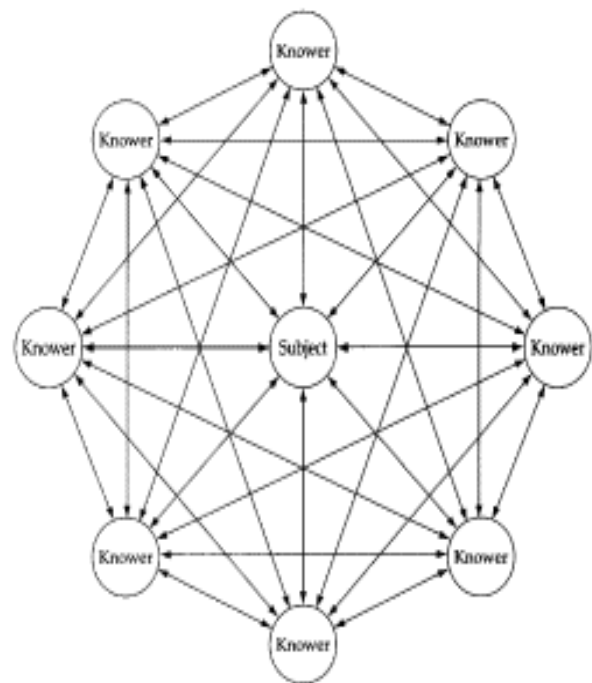
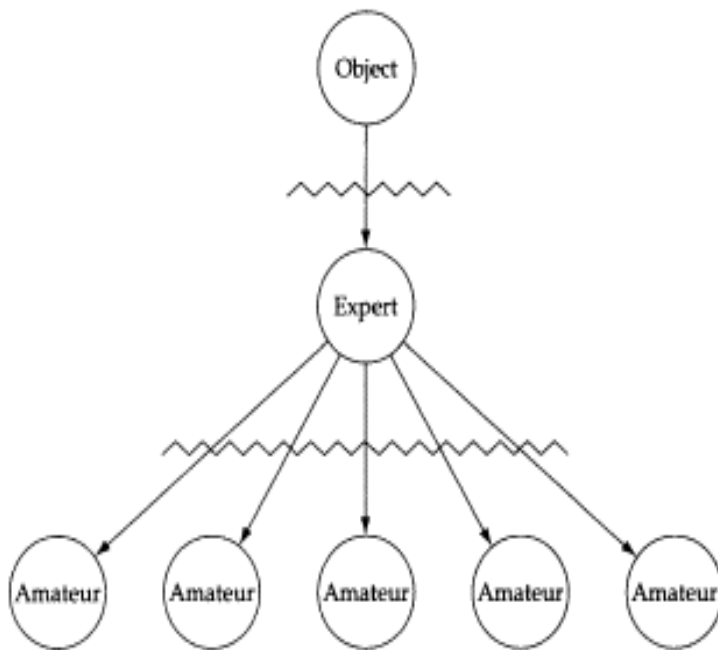
model of school/instruction sometimes called the “banking” model.

When people are gathered around God’s story, listening, learning and sharing, community is created. People are energized to share with others. This type of community is missional in its relational ways of knowing.

This is where I see a new model for Christian education, a greenhouse where faith can flourish, a space that is safe and hospitable when the transformation precipitated by learning can be painful. Christian education could provide an environment where people can:

- Learn the story of God’s people, not only biblical stories but also stories of exemplary Christians.
- Learn to articulate their own stories.
- Practice telling both types of stories.
- Learn how to listen.
- Reflect on how your story and my story and God’s story all fit together.

Listening and telling go together like two sides of a coin. Unless people have opportunities to articulate their personal stories and see the connections, there is not the passion and excitement to invite others to “come and see.” In order to be the missional church, we have to tell others about the wonderful steadfast love of God, be able to serve in the world in the name of God, and invite others to lift their voices in praise of our Creator. Faith formation, as the work of the Holy Spirit, needs our enthusiasm and our knowledge. Helping people know God’s story and connect a personal story to that larger story is part of the task of Christian education as well as faith formation. In this environment, the Holy Spirit then works to call, gather, enlighten and develop faith. Faith formation is inherently missional. Faith Formation thrives in a vibrant community of learning and such a community is open to inviting, an inherently missional move.



Listening and telling go together like two sides of a coin. Unless people have opportunities to articulate their personal stories and see the connections, there is not the passion and excitement to invite others to “come and see.” In order to be the missional church, we have to tell others about the wonderful steadfast love of God, be able to serve in the world in the name of God, and invite others to lift their voices in praise of our Creator. Faith formation as the work of the Holy Spirit needs our enthusiasm and our knowledge. Helping people know God’s story and connect a personal story to that larger story is part of the task of Christian education as well as faith formation. In this environment, the Holy Spirit then works to call, gather, enlighten and develop faith. Faith formation is inherently missional. Faith Formation thrives in a vibrant community of learning and such a community is open to inviting, an inherently missional move.

What if we moved from seeing faith formation as something the church does for children and youth to faith formation as accompanying all people in living their faith in everyday life?

Where Do We Go from Here?

For too long we have confused faith formation with the term, “Christian education.” For too long we have identified Christian education as the schooling/ instructional model giving that term negative connotations in many circles. For too long we have divorced faith formation from worship. For too long we focused on separate ministries for youth or children or adults when there should be a unified approach. For too long we have created programs to do activities to and for children and youth and adults rather than walking along side them in the process of faith formation, a process connected to the whole life of the congregation. Prayer, worship, service, Christian education, children’s ministry, youth and family ministry, mission

trips, rummage sales, potlucks, service projects, Bible studies, etc. are all part of faith formation. The intersection of the life to the congregation and our everyday experiences is fertile ground for mission. As we move into a missional age, we need conversation about new ways to nurture faith formation

Diana Butler Bass in her book, *Christianity After Religion*, has great optimism about the future of Christianity. She states, “Relational community, intentional practice and experiential belief are forming a new vision for what it means to be Christian in the twenty-first century, a pattern of spiritual awakening that is growing around the world” (24). Butler Bass outlines four steps or actions for spiritual awakening. She says, “At its best, church is holy performances. . . . sacred communities of performance where the faithful learn the script of God’s story, rehearse the reign of God, experience delight, surprise and wonder, and participate fully in the play (Bass, 259-261).

The four steps are:

1. Prepare by learning the overall religious story of our time.
2. Practice our faith intentionally in order to embody the story and help others experience compassion and justice.
3. Play with laughter and lightness, irony, improvisation, self-deprecation and satire.
4. Participate.

To talk about faith formation in a missional age means a call to experimentation as Terri Elton mentioned in her essay linking contextualization, creativity and collaboration. Everyone needs to prepare, practice, play and participate if we are to be a faithful community, living together in a changing world, inviting others in to participate. Playfulness and joy are attractational. Belief comes at the end of the process, not at the beginning, a process in which faith grows over time. Congregations need to playfully experiment with alternative forms of faith formation if we are to reach out to children, youth and young adults. They need

communities of faith to accompany them, support them and listen to them

In conclusion, I urge us to create new models to encourage and support faith formation in a missional age. We need to remember that faith formation is an undertaking of the whole faithful community involving all aspects of life in the home and in the congregation, integrating children, youth and young adults into the life of the faith community. Listening is a key skill to develop, learning how to walking along side those on the margins of the faith community rather than telling them what to believe. In the missional age it is more important to invite into participation before requiring statements of belief.

Faith formation of adults and parents becomes central as they are the ones to transmit the Christian faith to the next generation. I urge all of us to try new things, to share with each other, to keep the conversation flowing across organizational lines, across ministry areas, and across congregational and denominational lines. The task of faith formation with all of its challenges can seem overwhelming but we have been given a great commission: to share the good news of the gift of grace given through Jesus Christ

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Personal Religious Experiences & Catholic Youth in the National Study on Youth and Religion

Chris Miller

Beginning in 2001, Dr. Christian Smith and his colleagues at Notre Dame University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill undertook a national research project on the religious and spiritual lives of American Adolescents. This project, the most wide-scale research study ever conducted on American adolescents and their religious and spiritual lives, is known as the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). .

This article will examine the role of intense personal religious experiences (retreats, conferences, rallies, congresses, religious mission service trips, service projects, and camps) on religiosity of adolescents over the three Waves of the NSYR data.

Dr. Charlotte McCorquodale, in her analysis of Catholic teenagers and their parents with the National Study of Youth and Religion, states, “generally, the findings of this study show that

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young people who attend Catholic schools, attend parish religious education, and/or currently participate in a youth group demonstrate a higher overall participation rate in youth ministry related activities, such as retreats, conferences, rallies, or congresses, and mission trips.

Retreats, Conferences, Rallies, and Congresses

The following section compares the role of retreats, conferences, rallies, and congresses (RCRC) attended with three or five questions about individual faith attributes. In Wave One (high school youth), the following questions are compared: How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping your major life decisions? How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time? Have you ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful? Have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God. In Waves Two and Three the following questions are compared: How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time? Have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God?

First Wave Research: Ages 13-17

While 65%, or 391, of the Catholic population age 13-17 in Wave One did not attend at least one retreat, conference, rally or congress (RCRC), 219 teens did, with 79 attending one RCRC, and 140 attending two or more retreats, conferences, rallies or congresses.

In general, those who attend one retreat, conference, rally, and congress report that religious faith is extremely important/very important in shaping daily life at a significantly higher level than those who don't. Those that attend at least one RCRC are likely

to be given tools on how to live ones' daily life in a religious manner. This finding is in agreement with McCorquodale's finding: "using a t-test for independent samples to compare those young people that have participated in at least one retreat, rally, conference, or congress versus those who have not, it was found that participants report being significantly closer to God and report that religion plays an important part in shaping their everyday life significantly more than their counterparts" (22). In addition, if the categories extremely important, very important, and somewhat important are combined, the percentages for youth attending no RCRC are 81%, 89% for one RCRC, and 96% for two or more RCRC.

In terms of how important or unimportant religious faith is in shaping major life decisions, those that go on at least one retreat, conference, rally, or congress vs. those that don't report that religious faith is extremely or very important in shaping major life decisions. However, the percentage increase between zero and one retreat is not as great as the daily life question. While retreats, conferences, rallies, and congresses may help provide individuals with tools to increase ones' daily life, they may not necessarily provide assistance with major life decisions.

There is a significant difference between those that attended one RCRC and those that did not on making a personal commitment to live life for God. However, there doesn't appear to be an increase in personal commitment to God tied to the number of RCRC attended. In general, the rate is stable after attendance in one RCRC.

In looking at the responses to the question how distant or close adolescents feel to God most of the time, those that attend at least one RCRC report they feel very and extremely close to God at a higher level than those who don't. This finding is in agreement with McCorquodale's findings. There is not much difference between those attending two or more RCRC on this question.

In general, the more RCRC attended the higher number of teens reported having

experiences of moving and powerful worship. Worship experiences (masses, liturgies, prayer services) are often incorporated into RCRC events and this response is finding is not surprising.

Finally, on the question, have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God, there is a significant difference between those adolescents who attended one RCRC vs. those that did not, at an almost 2/3 level.

Second Wave Research: Ages 16-21

While 68%, or 323, of the Catholic population age 16-21 in Wave Two did not attend at least one retreat, conference, rally or congress (RCRC), 149 teens did, with 66 attending one RCRC, and 83 attending two or more retreats, conferences, rallies or congresses.

In general, those who attend more retreats, conferences, rallies, and congresses report that religious faith is extremely important/very important/somewhat important than those who don't. The percentages for youth attending no RCRC are 76%, 90% for one RCRC, and 92% for two or more RCRC.

In looking at the responses to the question how distant or close adolescents feel to God most of the time, those that attend more RCRC report they feel very and extremely close to God at higher levels than those who don't, increasing by 10% between zero RCRC, one RCRC, and two RCRC attended. In addition, the percentages for extremely distant, very distant, and somewhat distant all decrease the more RCRC that adolescents engage in.

Finally, on the question, have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God, adolescents who attended one RCRC vs. those that did not responded yes to this question, more than doubling the percentage response between zero and one RCRC.

Third Wave Research: Ages 18-23

While 80%, or 327, of the Catholic population age 18-23 did not attend at least one retreat,

conference, rally or congress (RCRC), 83 young adults did, with 48 attending one RCRC, and 35 attending two or more retreats, conferences, rallies or congresses. It is important to note that the low number and percentage of participants who attended a RCRC in this Wave is very small and the findings may not be truly representative of this age group.

In general, those who attend more retreats, conferences, rallies, and congresses report that religious faith is extremely important/very important/somewhat important than those who don't. The percentages for young adults attending no RCRC are 78%, 84% for one RCRC, and 92% for two or more RCRC. Those that attend two or more retreats claim to feel very and extremely close to God at a higher rate than those who don't go on a retreat or go on one retreat. In addition, the percentages for extremely distant, very distant, and somewhat distant all decrease the more RCRC that adolescents engage in.

Finally, on the question, have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God, young adults who attended more RCRC report yes at higher levels, going from 30% with no RCRC to 44% with one RCRC and 57% with two or more RCRC.

Mission Trips

The following section compares the role of religious mission team trips attended or religious service projects participated on with three or five questions about individual faith attributes. In Wave One the following questions are compared: How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping your major life decisions? How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time? Have you ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful? Have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God? In Wave Two and Three the following questions are compared: How

important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time? Have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God?

First Wave Research: Ages 13-17

While 77%, or 475, of the Catholic population age 13-17 in Wave One did not attend at least one mission team trip or religious service project, 139 teens did, with 56 attending one mission team trip or religious service project and 83 attending two or more mission team trips or religious service projects.

In general, those who attend one mission team trip or religious service project report that religious faith is extremely important/very important/somewhat important in shaping daily life at a higher level than those who don't. This finding is in agreement with McCorquodale's finding: "using a t-test for independent samples to compare those young people that have participated in at least one mission trip or extended service project participate versus those who have not, it was found that participants report being significantly closer to God and report that religion plays an important part in shaping their everyday life significantly more than their counterparts" (22). Those attending two or more mission team trips or religious service projects do not report significantly higher percentages over those who went on one.

In terms of how important or unimportant religious faith is in shaping major life decisions, those that go on more mission team trips or religious service projects report higher levels of importance of religious faith on their daily life. Getting away on a mission trip may provide an opportunity for adolescents to reflect and pray on life decisions they may be encountering.

In looking at the responses to the question how distant or close adolescents feel to God most of the time, those that attend at least one mission trip or extended service project report they feel very and extremely close to God at a

higher level than those who don't. This finding is in agreement with McCorquodale's findings.

In general, the more religious mission team trips or religious service projects attended the higher number of teens reported having experiences of moving and powerful worship. Worship experiences are often incorporated into mission trips or service projects.

Finally, on the question, "Have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God?", there is not much movement between zero, one, and two mission trips or service projects attended. While mission trips can be transformative for some young people, many mission trips or service projects are focused on the "here and now" and may not lead adolescents to reflect upon how they live their daily life.

Second Wave Research: Ages 16-21

While 77%, or 365, of the Catholic population in Wave Two age 16-21 did not attend at least one mission team trip or religious service project, 109 teens did, with 61 attending one mission team trip or religious service project, and 48 attending two or more mission team trips or religious service projects.

In general, those who attend one mission team trip or religious service project report that religious faith is extremely important/very important in shaping daily life at a higher level than those who don't. Those attending two or more mission team trips or religious service projects report higher percentages for the category extremely important and very important over those who went on one.

In looking at the responses to the question how distant or close adolescents feel to God most of the time, those that attend two mission trips or extended service projects report they feel very and extremely close to God at higher levels than those who don't attend any and higher than those who attended one.

Finally, on the question, have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God; there is significant movement

between zero and one mission team or service project attended. As adolescents get older, they are likely to be examining how they want to live their life and the role of faith within their life.

Third Wave Research: Ages 18-23

Only 10%, or 365, of Catholics surveyed in Wave Three attended a mission team trip or religious service project in the previous two years. Only 32 young adults attended a trip or project, not enough to make any significant statements or findings.

Summer Camps

First Wave Research: Ages 13-17

The following section compares the role of summer camps run by a religious organization attended with five questions about individual faith attributes. In Wave One, the following questions are compared: How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping your major life decisions? How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time? Have you ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful? Have you ever made a personal commitment to live your life for God?

While 80%, or 489, of the Catholic population age 13-17 in Wave one did not attend at least one religious summer camp, 126 teens did, with 55 attending one religious summer camp and 71 attending two or more religious summer camps.

Generally speaking, camps do not have a significant impact on how important religious faith is in shaping daily life and major life decisions. On the distance or closeness to God, there is more of an impact based upon the number of retreats attended. On the question related to having a moving and powerful spiritual worship experience those that

attended more retreats state yes at higher levels. Religious liturgies and other spiritual activities tend to be a part of these experiences. Finally, there is a significant difference between those who attended one retreat and those that did not in making a personal commitment to God.

Interviews with Youth

Within the section “religious practices” in the interview transcripts most of the interviewers asked a question about the student’s attendance on a religious summer camp, youth retreat, conference, service project or missions trip. Of the 53 Catholic teens that were interviewed in Wave One, 27 had responded with a yes to attending some-sort of religious summer camp, youth retreat, conference, service project or missions trip. The interviewers also asked if the experience had a lasting impact on the adolescent’s faith.

In Wave One 53 teens that were interviewed identified themselves as Catholic.

- Of this number, 27 had participated in some-sort of intense personal religious experience.
- Of the 27, three said that summer camp had a lasting effect; three said it did not and four didn’t know.
- Of the 27, two said that service had a lasting effect and two said it did not.
- Of the 27, none said that a mission trip had a lasting effect.
- Of the 27, one said that a conference had a lasting effect.
- Of the 27 that were asked about retreats, 16 did not respond, 8 said that the retreat had a lasting effect; two said it didn’t and 1 did not know. This data was significant at the .005 level.

In Wave Two 27 teens that were interviewed identified themselves as Catholic.

- Of this number, 10 had participated in some-sort of intense personal religious experience in the last two years.
- Of the 10, 3 did not respond, 3 responded a retreat had a lasting effect, 2 said it didn't, and 2 did not know.

Case Studies

The following case studies highlight the lives of eight adolescents in an attempt to distill what factors influence students to think positively about retreats and the impact they have. All of the interviews were conducted in the summer months (June, July, August) of 2003, with the exception of one that was conducted in March of 2003. Names of students have been changed to protect their identity.

Adam is a 15 year-old white male who lives in the southeast region of the United States. He considers himself a Catholic, but is largely inactive in his faith, attending church once in a while. Adam lives with his dad, step-mom and sister, and his biological mother and brother live down the street in the same town. His parents divorced when he was younger, between the ages of 3 and 5. He enjoys skateboarding and drawing cartoons and attends a public high school. Adam has attended Baptist and Catholic services, depending upon the parent he is with. He has been to a retreat and a lock in and when asked how the experience affected him, he responded, "it didn't affect me much except for like I was a little more religious after that, but not that much, Just, just a little bit."

Angela is a 14 year-old white female who lives in the southwest region of the United States. She considers herself Catholic but doesn't feel that religion is very central in her life. She lives with her mom, dad, and sister who is 11. Her mom is Catholic and dad is Jewish. Angela does attend a Catholic school and attends mass on Wednesday mornings. Her religious beliefs are very similar to her parents. Angela attends retreats at school and participates in community service projects

through St. Vincent De Paul. She stated, "the retreats are you, mostly, you would do, you'd break into groups within your class and you do fun activities, usually they would have some, some religious effect, I think and you would read the Bible, pray. It give you more information, helps you get a better sense of teachings."

Brian is a 16 year-old black male who lives in a big city in the northeast region of the United States. Violence and gangs are present in Brian's neighborhood but he tries his best to stay away from that element. He was raised Catholic but considers himself non-religious. He lives with his mom and dad and has two brothers, one who is away a school and the other who has cerebral palsy. They are both older than Brian. He attends a public high school. Brian's mother attends a Catholic church and his dad is pretty secular. He attended a weekend retreat earlier in the year and upon being asked how the retreat affected him, he stated, "well, I guess, like when, after that, the, the, the service and I got, I had like, enlightenment I guess you could say, it made me think about certain things more, you know, how, how would I take care of it, how could, what things could I, what changes could I make to make my overall life better. It was positive."

Becky is a 16 year-old Hispanic female who lives in the southwest region of the United States. She has been raised a Catholic her whole life and considers herself very active in the sense she attends youth group and mass 2-3 times a month. Becky lives with her mom, dad, and younger sister and is very close to her family. She likes to sing and dance and attends the local public school. Becky has been involved with attending and leading retreats through her parish. Upon being asked how these experiences affected her, she stated, "I would say on each retreat we learned something new or many things new."

Christian is a 16 year-old white male who lives in the northeast region of the United States. He considers himself a Catholic and is pretty active in his faith, attending church weekly and has been confirmed. Christian lives

with his mom, dad, brother, and sister and attends a public high school. His mom was raised a Catholic and dad an Episcopalian, but his dad converted to Catholicism. He considers his grandparents as die-hard Catholics. Christian stated, “you always grow, every time you go to church you always grow religiously. You learn more and that, yeah. Mass in general and Catholic retreats (have been a turning point).”

Carrie is 18 year-old white female who lives in New England. She is Catholic and considers herself somewhat active in her faith, and recently graduated from a Catholic high school. She lives with her mom, dad, and sister. Her mom is Catholic and Carrie attends church weekly, although she has not been recently. Her dad doesn’t attend church. Carrie reports her religious beliefs are similar to her mom’s. She attended Catholic school since 3rd grade and reports that religion class has had an impact on her beliefs. Upon being asked about her participation in retreats, she stated, “you do retreats sometimes at school for like a day. It’s cool, I like that. We would like reflect on everything that’s going on. And a lot of times about like unity about like in the class. But it was also religious. We would put on a mass or prayer service, we would like plan it and set everything up. It usually like strengthened my life.”

Dave is an 18 year-old Hispanic male who lives in a major city on the west coast of the United States. He is Catholic and attends church weekly and states his religious beliefs are very similar to his parents’ beliefs. Dave lives with his mom and dad and has a brother who is significantly older than him. He attended public schools and recently graduated high school, but did attend a Catholic school in kindergarten and first grade. Upon being asked about his experience attending a retreat, Dave stated, “at first I was just oh, this sucks, you know and then we got there and we had to go to sleep at three, and every, it was in the morning every day was just sick and but by the last day, it was different because I got to see people differently, I got to become good friends with people, I had felt

closer, and I came home I was completely stress free. It still affects me you know I look back and I’m like wow, you know that was, that was a good time, it helped me a lot.”

Debbie is an 18 year-old white female who lives in New England. She lives with her mom, as her parents divorced when she was 9. Her dad lives in another part of the state with her step-mom and biological sister. She has one sister who is 22 who lives on the west coast. Debbie attends church on a weekly basis and feels that faith should be a central thing in her life. She attended a Catholic high school and considers her mom as an orthodox Catholic. Debbie has attended retreats at her school and stated, “its actually usually really awesome and it makes you more in touch with God but then you know a week later kids forget about it and they’re right back to they way that they were, so that always happens like that, so. I think it, it helps me um, just to you know, like reconnect myself with God and you know just see a side maybe that I haven’t seen before, so, yeah.”

Developmental Assets

The Search Institute, a non-profit research based organization out of Minneapolis, MN, works to discover what children and adolescents need to succeed in their families, schools, and communities. The organization has created the developmental asset framework, which are 40 common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible, and successful adults.

In their 1997 document, *Renewing the Vision*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recognize the strength of the developmental asset model and state, “this model of healthy adolescent development offers practical direction for the church’s ministry today and in the future. Ministry with adolescents will need to be more comprehensive and community-wide to take

full advantage of the opportunities presented by this research.”

Five of the 40 assets will be explored in an attempt to answer the question, what factors influence students to think positively about retreats? Adolescents that think positively about retreats are more likely to view them as having an impact on their spiritual and religious life.

Asset #1: Family support—family life provides high levels of love and support.

Each of the adolescents spoke about their relationships with their family members. By and large, the adolescents were close to at least one parent in their life, and they reported their parents were generally supportive and understanding. Almost all of the teens reported their parents know their friends pretty well. When asked how family relationships are affected by religion, two of the adolescents, Adam and Brian, reported not at all. Christian reported his relationship is affected—it provides unity for the family. Dave reported the rules of the church, such as being kind to family members, as impacting the relationships with his parents. Angela stated that religion gives the family something to talk about, and Becky reported religion as a source of family togetherness. Carrie stated religion provides a source of sharing with her mom and sister, and Debbie reported religion provides a guideline on how to be more respectful and forgiving of people and her family. Parents of these adolescents appear to provide high levels of love and support to their children.

Asset #3: Other adult relationships—young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.

When asked about the teen’s experiences with non-parent adults at their church, most responded with the belief that adults are helpful and welcoming. Dave reported the adults on the retreat he attended were supportive and two students (Christian and Carrie) responded their parish priest was welcoming. Adam and Brian reported adults in

their church are helpful. Angela and Becky reported adults in their church are welcoming and warm. Debbie stated the adults are “nice and cool people” and actually enjoys hanging out with adults more than kids. Adult relationships can help foster a greater sense of community.

Asset #5: Caring school climate—school provides a caring, encouraging environment.

Of the three students that attended Catholic school, two of the three felt the school has had an impact on their faith life. Angela reported her co-ed Catholic school has not had an impact on her life, but does report strong engagement in the social and academic aspect of her school. Carrie reports her school having a positive effect on her religion faith, as it provides her the chance to talk and think about religion on a daily basis. Debbie stated her school has had a huge impact on her faith: “it was awesome, they just, they made you feel more like a, like a lot like a family and I mean, sometimes, you know it got like really nit-picky with the rules and stuff, but on the whole, they were very, like they were a lot like family, they, they wanted to help you and you know they were good, you know it had a big affect on how kids, you know, lived their life during high school and stuff.” Catholic schools often provide a caring, encouraging environment for students, which may in turn lead to being willing to open up and share their feelings with others.

Asset #9: Service to others—young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.

The adolescents were asked how engaged they were in community service, and how much people their age should be involved in the community. Adam was not engaged in community service, but felt people should help one another out, by stating, “ it’s doing the right thing and you’re helping someone else you know, who is in need.” Brian is not engaged in community service either, but

believes teens should engage in community service because “in the long run it would benefit them, you know, it would keep them more active and it, it keeps them, you know, away from all the, the things in the neighborhood, like drugs and violence, keep them occupied.” Christian engages in service through his school and church and believes “you should always help people—I mean you always like to get a break too and I mean you’re not going to get one unless you help other people first, so.” Dave volunteered at a local hospital as a requirement for a class and ended up going after the requirement was over, as he enjoyed getting to know the people at the agency and befriended them. Angela volunteers to teach younger kids how to swim and believes teenagers should be involved in volunteer work as a way to give back to people who have helped you along the way. Becky has volunteered at a senior center and picked up trash along the roadway, but doesn’t feel teens should be required to participate in service. Carrie became engaged in service through her school, which has a 20-hour graduation requirement. She volunteered her time at a therapeutic horse back riding center and feels that teens should make time for service, as “you have to give to get, like one hand washes the other. You have to give and receive and I guess I’ve been getting a lot.” Debbie was involved in community service projects for a school requirement and believes community service makes people feel better and closer to God. Those young people who are engaged in community service are likely to meet others who engage in service and build relationships.

Asset #19: Religious community—young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.

All of the teens go to church a few times of year, with half of them (Christian, Dave, Becky, and Debbie) attending church on a weekly basis, and Angela attends school masses on Wednesdays. Becky has become quite involved in her youth group and Debbie

prays the Rosary on a regular basis. Almost all of the adolescents regularly pray, some daily. When asked if church helps them learn, most stated that it does by answering questions they have about their faith. The more engaged teens are in their faith the more likely they are to feel comfortable and open to experiences such as retreats.

Asset #32: planning and decision-making—young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

The adolescents were asked a few different questions about decision-making in their life. Specifically, they were asked if religion affects how they make decisions. Of the 7 students that responded to this question in the interviews, all responded is the positive. Adam stated religion helps with determining right from wrong. Christian stated religion affects decisions, especially around issues of morality. Dave cited his prayer life, which leads to being a happier person, thus impacting how he engages with people around him. Angela reported religion helps her make better decisions, and Becky spoke about sharing in her youth group, which allows her to see that others have problems and can speak to them when having to make decisions. Carrie stated religion impacts the way she interacts with other people by being more respectful and Debbie stated her religion classes had a big influence on her decision-making abilities. Overall adolescents surveyed show that faith has an impact on planning and decision-making and attendance on retreats may help with decision-making skills.

Summary

Intense personal religious experiences can and often do have an impact on adolescents as demonstrated within the three Waves of the NSYR data. Those that participate in at least one intense personal religious experience by and large tend to 1) rank religious faith as important in shaping how they live their daily

life, 2) rank religious faith as important in shaping their major life decisions, 3) feel that God is close to them most of the time, 4) have an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful, and 5) have made a personal commitment to live their life for God. Religious camps tend not to make a significant difference on daily life and major life decisions.

It is important to note that less than 40% of the 618 Catholic respondents in Wave One, 35% of the 480 Catholic respondents in Wave two and 20% of the 412 respondents in Wave Three of the NSYR have participated in some sort of intense religious experience. By and large a majority of Catholic youth and young adults in the US, as demonstrated by the NSYR sample, do not participate in intense personal religious experiences. However, those that do are impacted by these experiences and religious educational leaders ought to consider offering these experiences to young people whenever possible.

Within the segment of the Catholic population selected for an in-person interview as part of the National Study of Youth and Religion research project, analysis of the Wave One data shows, at a statistically significant level, that retreats do indeed have a lasting effect, as measured by the student's response to the question, "How did the experience affect you?" Retreats can help adolescents grapple with questions of faith and lead them into deeper levels of engagement. They provide the opportunity for adolescents to step back from the real world and reflect on who they are and who they are becoming. As evident by the case studies presented, retreats can help provide teens with tools and tips for life skills and better understanding their faith.

While there does not appear to be any major differences in the responses to interview questions related to faith and religion based upon geographic factors, the sample size is too small to make any specific findings. The two Hispanic teens both stated that God is personal and active in their lives, something that may be attributed to the Hispanic culture that tends to value the role of religion. An

additional element that does appear to have an impact on the responses is age. Generally speaking the older the students were the more in-depth the responses were, which may be attributed to the growth of the cognitive realm.

In examining the assets that the survey participants demonstrated, it can be concluded that those teens who report retreats as having an impact on their faith have high levels of love and support from their family. Parents of students who attended a retreat may be more likely to engage their teen in discussion and dialogue about the retreat than those families that do not have high levels of love and support. Parishes and schools might want to consider adding a parent component to retreats, such as a closing mass or barbeque as a way to encourage parent-child discussions.

Those that are impacted by a retreat are likely to have other adults that they can talk to and trust within a religious community, as almost all of the students reported. Search Institute's belief that it take a whole village to raise a child is emphasized with this finding. Parishes should consider how adults can support retreat ministries, such as recruiting adult volunteers, creating a space for adult-teen dialogue pre or post a retreat, and creating prayer groups that pray for the teens while they are on retreat.

Two of the three students who attended a Catholic high school reported the school had an impact on their faith life, especially since they were able to discuss religious and faith beliefs in religion class, which may result in increased willingness to reflect and share at a deeper level on a retreat.

Those that stated a retreat had an impact on them are likely to be engaged in community service, or at least value the idea of serving others. By being involved in service opportunities, teenagers are likely to meet others who engage in service and build relationships with others, which could impact their participation and satisfaction in a retreat setting. Parishes and schools should consider integrating service programs and projects into

their ministry, and could potentially tie service into a retreat setting or program.

Those that found retreats impactful are likely to attend church on a regular basis. Attending church services may allow teens to feel more comfortable within their religious community and open to experiences such as retreats. Campus and youth ministers ought to examine how to incorporate elements of liturgy into pre and post retreat activities, as well as during the actual retreat itself. A closing Mass at the end of the retreat followed by a barbeque is one way of concluding a retreat.

Attendance on a retreat can influence an adolescent's decision-making ability and allow him or her to reflect on previous, present, and future decisions in light of elements presented in a retreat. Retreat ministers might want to include an educational element of decision-making skills into the retreat program.

Retreat ministry is an area where the Catholic church, at all levels, should provide

resources and training to maximize the potential impact of effective retreats on the faith lives of adolescents.

Works Cited

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Pope Francis Goes to Washington, DC

Daniel J. Pierson

On March 13, 2015 Pope Francis celebrated his second anniversary as Bishop of Rome, Pope of the Catholic Church, and a spiritual leader for all people. The media, people around the world, our friends and colleagues are inspired by Pope Francis' life, message, and witness.

Fully nine-in-ten U.S. Catholics now say they have a favorable view of Francis, including nearly six-in-ten who have a "very favorable" view. Francis' favorability rating among U.S. Catholics is comparable to ratings for Pope John Paul II in the 1980s and '90s, and has surpassed any favorability rating for Pope Benedict XVI in Pew Research Center surveys.

The latest Pew Research Center survey, conducted Feb. 18-22, 2015, on landlines and cell phones among a national sample of 1,504 adults, finds that the pope's popularity is very broad based. He is most widely admired by Catholics, but six-in-ten Protestants and two-thirds of the religiously unaffiliated also view him favorably.

Francis also is liked by American Protestants. According to the most recent Pew Research poll, 74% of white mainline Protestants and 60% of white evangelical Protestants say they view him favorably. Francis is popular even among those without a religious affiliation. Fully two-thirds of religious "nones" (68%) in the most recent Pew Research poll say they view the current pontiff favorably, up from just 39% in March 2013.

Dan Pierson has served as a catechist, Catholic school teacher, parish and diocesan director of religious education. He is the founder of eCatechist.com, faithAlivebooks.com and Faith Alive Books Publishing. He is co-author with Susan Stark of *Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Action*. (Tarcher/Penguin. 2015) and *What Do I Do Now: A Guide for the Reluctant Catechist* (Pflaum Publishing. 2005). (pierson.dj@gmail.com)

He is viewed more favorably by Americans over the age of 65 than among those under 50, but even those in the latter category express mostly positive opinions about Pope Francis. Both men and women give Francis a positive rating, and Republicans and Democrats are united in their esteem for him.” (Pew Research Center March 5, 2015)

Pope Francis in the U.S.

On September 23 Pope Francis will meet with President Barack Obama at the White House. While in Washington, he will address a joint session of Congress on September 24.

While in Washington Pope Francis will canonize Blessed Junipero Serra at the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

On the morning of September 25 he will address the U. N. General Assembly. He will meet separately with Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary-general and with the president of the General Assembly. Ban noted that the pope's visit comes during the United Nations' 70th anniversary, in which its members would make decisions about sustainable development, climate change and peace. He said he was confident the pope's visit would inspire the international community to redouble its efforts for social justice, tolerance and understanding.

On Sept. 26 and 27 Pope Francis will attend the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. The World Meeting of Families, sponsored by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family, is the world's largest Catholic gathering of families and is held every three years. The World Meeting of Families 2015 will be September 22-27, 2015, hosted by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and will focus on the theme “Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive,” emphasizing the impact of the love and life of families on society.

Prior to Pope Francis's visit to the United States it has been announced that Pope Francis will publish an encyclical on climate change in the summer and plans to convene a

meeting of faith leaders on the issue ahead of two crucial summits on the environment.

From October 4-25, 2015 the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in Vatican City. The theme: “The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world.” The XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will continue the work of the III Extraordinary General Assembly (2014) by reflecting further on the points discussed so as to formulate appropriate pastoral guidelines for the pastoral care of the person and the family. After an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, it is common for the Holy Father to issue a substantive document, called a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, which takes up the themes of the Synod and deepens them further.

Pope Francis has declared a Year of Jubilee of Mercy, beginning on December 8, 2015 and concluding on November 20, 2016.

“Dear brothers and sisters, I have thought about how the Church can make clear its mission of being a witness of mercy.” It's a journey that starts with a spiritual conversion. For this reason I have decided to declare an Extraordinary Jubilee that has the mercy of God at its center. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy.”

So What?

Thanks to Pope Francis, the comprehensive coverage by both the general and religious media and his popularity among all people, 2015-2016 is an excellent opportunity for Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Evangelical Protestants to join together in adult faith formation and spiritual enrichment programming focusing on the message and teachings of Pope Francis. It gives everyone a significant and timely opportunity for conversation, theological reflection and action.

Tips for Adult Faith Formation

1. *Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer and Action* by Susan Stark and Daniel J. Pierson (Tarcher/Penguin) can be used individually and in both small and large group settings.

The reflections in this book, which are drawn from the words of Pope Francis and Scripture, speak to the hearts of men, women, and children everywhere about the things in life that matter the most. The book challenges and inspires us to practice Pope Francis' message of mercy and compassion. It is an excellent resource for a six-week small group faith-sharing program using the index to choose themes of interest to the group. It offers catechesis and spiritual enrichment for Pope Francis' themes and teachings throughout the year

A congregation may want to present *Reflections from Pope Francis* to the entire community. Include information in church bulletin, website, social media, and announcement at Mass. Invite members to a church-wide assembly. At the gathering, offer a short presentation on the message and teachings of Pope Francis. Lead people through one of the "reflections," inviting them to share with others in a small group. If possible, give all participants a copy of *Reflections from Pope Francis*. Encourage them to use either individually or with others throughout the year of Jubilee of Mercy.

For more specific ideas for using *Reflections from Pope Francis*, visit <http://www.faithAlivebooks.com> and download *5 Ways to Use Reflections from Pope Francis*.

2. Over the summer arrange viewing parties that will be hosted by members and held in homes in the fall. Recruit individuals to serve as a host/facilitator, who will record

the three major addresses of Pope Francis: Congress, United Nations, World Meeting of Families. Each host selects date and time for gathering, invite members of the neighborhood, friends, church. Extend the invitation to Catholics, Protestants, nones, etc.

At the meeting watch the Pope's address or excerpts and then facilitate the discussion using the following two questions:

- The one idea that I found most interesting. . . .
- In light of what I have heard, the one thing that I/we could do is

3. While the World Meetings of Families in Philadelphia focuses on celebrating family in the Catholic Church, this event can be a catalyst for all churches to join together and explore ways that individual congregations can pray, celebrate, educate for the *faith formation and spiritual enrichment of families*.

Work together with neighboring churches in developing a family ministry that addresses the six areas of focus that have been identified through research of Vibrant Faith Ministries. These include:

- Talk with each other about their faith
- Pray together in ways that are comfortable and comports
- Ritualize their important moments
- Reach out in service and support of each other
- Share Bible stories
- Learn about faith together

For a complete description of these six areas, read "Forming Faith @ Home" by Leif Kehrwald, which appeared in the Winter 2015 online journal, *Lifelong Faith*, and visit www.VibrantFaithatHome.org.

In preparation for the World Meeting of Families the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

has developed a website that includes articles, themes, resources, education, prayers, etc.

4. One of the emerging roles and responsibilities of the director of adult faith formation is the *curation of resources* and tools for faith formation and spiritual enrichment: articles, excerpts, quotes, video, podcasts, websites, email, social media. Explore ways to creatively use the Sunday bulletin for sharing these ideas and resources on family, immigration, mercy, peace, inequality, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue. Personalize the Sunday bulletin by inviting members of the church to offer a reflection by completing one of the following sentences .

- I like Pope Francis because. . . .
- The one thing I have learned from Pope Francis. . . .
- The one thing I would like to share with Pope Francis. . . .

5. Join together with neighboring churches and offer presentations and discussions on the apostolic exhortation, *Joy of the Gospel*, and on the encyclical on the environment. Coordinate small group discussions on these documents or on one the many books by or about Pope Francis.

Resources

Reflections from Pope Francis: An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer, and Action by Susan Stark and Daniel J. Pierson. Tarcher/Penguin

The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope by Austen Ivereigh. Picador.

Walking with Jesus: A Way Forward for the Church by Pope Francis. Loyola Press.

Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives by Cardinal Walter Kasper. Paulist Press.

Family and Life: Pastoral Reflections by Pope Francis. Sadlier Religion and Paulist Press.

The Spirit of Saint Francis: Inspiring Words from Pope Francis edited by Alicia von Stamwitz. Franciscan Media.

Social Media

The Holy See: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>

Official Vatican Network on Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/news.va.en?fref=ts>

America/Media: A Jesuit Ministry:
<http://americamagazine.org/>

Catholic News Service: <http://cnstopstories.com/about-catholic-news-service/>

Catholic Apostolate Center—Pope Francis Portal: <http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/pope-francis-portal.html>

Crux (Boston Globe)—Covering All Things Catholic: <http://www.cruxnow.com/>

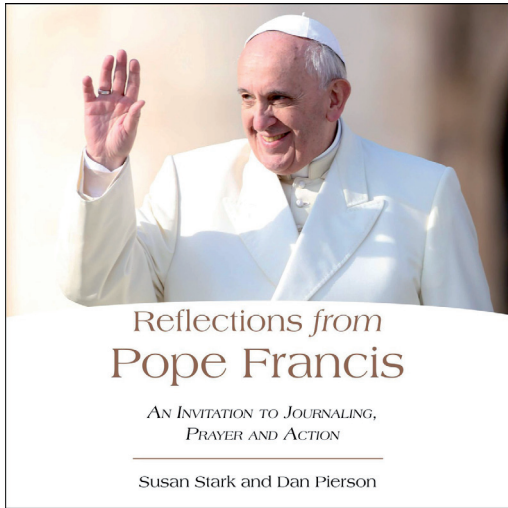
Salt and Light Media:
<http://www.saltandlighttv.org>

National Catholic Reporter:
<http://ncronline.org>

The Pope App: Pontificium Consilium de Communicationibus Socialibus

USCCB Papal Visit:
<http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/papal-visit-2015/index.cfm/backgrounders/philadelp>

World Meeting of Families:
<http://www.worldmeeting2015.org/>



Reflections from Pope Francis

An Invitation to Journaling, Prayer, and Action

Susan Stark
Daniel J. Pierson

Available in paperback, e-book format,
as an audio book, and a 2 CD set

A journal-style book containing inspirational messages from Pope Francis—Time magazine’s Person of the Year for 2013

Reflections from Pope Francis features brief excerpts for reflection from Pope Francis’s homilies, speeches, and addresses—along with invitation to prayer, writing, and action in a unique “journal style” book with space on each page for the reader to write down their own reflections on the powerful messages contained within each page. Complete with a focusing statement and scripture passages that introduce and summarize the theme of that page’s reflection, these excerpts highlight important themes for humanity—such as care for the poor, mercy, forgiveness, and brotherhood.

Reflections From Pope Francis can be used in many ways in the parish: adult education, catechist formation, small faith sharing groups, prayer and reflection to begin pastoral staff and parish committee meetings, and young adult ministry.

Praise

“We have in this volume a vision of how Pope Francis sees the mission of the Church and of society. His reflections are inspiring and challenging, demanding and joy-filled. Anyone accepting the invitation to journal with Pope Francis will be enriched.”
—Bishop Robert Morneau, auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Green Bay

“*Reflections from Pope Francis* is a mosaic of shards and snippets of papal wisdom, insights by a Bishop of Rome with the common touch, an attractive humility, and a deep familiarity with scripture, the human condition, the yearning call to holiness.”
—Michael W Higgins, author of *Thomas Merton: Faithful Visionary* and *The Unquiet Monk: Thomas Merton’s Questing Faith*

“For those who want to know more about Pope Francis, but are short on time, this book has a wealth of wonderful, brief selections that are perfect for prayer and reflection. Pierson and Stark capture the pope’s theology of mercy and his call to live more joyfully and authentically as followers of Christ.”
—Julie Hanlon Rubio, author of *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* and Professor of Christian Ethics, St. Louis University

“Susan Stark and Dan Pierson have done us all a great favor by gathering gems from Pope Francis’s statements during his first year as Pope. Each selection touches on a key aspect of the Pope’s ministry; the sentences or paragraph selected capture his heart and spirit so well. With ample space for reflection, journaling, and sharing, this book serves well as a resource for individual reflection and small-group exchange. Evangelizers, pastors, preachers, religious education directors, and those serving as adult faith formators will cherish this wonderful collection.”
—Father Francis P. DeSiano, CSP, president of the Paulist Evangelization Ministries

“If the world had to pick a CEO of Compassion, Pope Francis would fill the post ably. His words remind us of the opportunity to make every moment shine with grace and of the freedom that comes from opening our hearts.”
—Kristin Ohlson, author of *Stalking the Divine*