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The Seasons of adult faith formation

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PART THREE: Developing Faith Formation for the Seasons of Adulthood

It's time for every Christian church to commit itself to developing faith formation for every season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults! We've discussed the importance of adult faith formation; we've produced official documents and vision statements; we've sponsored conferences and workshops; and we've even produced a variety of resources for adults. But to no avail. Adult faith formation remains stuck in neutral. It is the weakest ministry in most congregations—even though we are talking about everyone over eighteen years old!

Let's commit ourselves to developing faith formation for every adult—young adult, midlife adult, mature adult, older adult—in our congregation and in the wider community. It's possible today! We will need to learn new ways of thinking and acting. But adult formation for every adult is possible if we use twenty-first century practices, approaches, and resources.

We will need new insights—drawn from research, theory, and practice—to inform us and guide the development of adult faith formation through the four seasons of adulthood. We will need new approaches and practices to engage all the seasons of an adult's life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today's world. We will need a new model of faith formation that provides a platform to reach *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community.

The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation is designed to provide pastors, church staff and ministry leaders, adult faith formation coordinators and educators, and all faith formation leaders with a deeper understanding of adulthood today, a vision of twenty-first century adult faith formation, and the tools and processes for designing faith formation for all the seasons of adulthood.

Chapter 1 by John Roberto presents a vision of what adult faith formation can look like in the twenty-first century—a holistic vision of faith and faith-forming processes, eight practices or features to guide the development of twenty-first century faith formation, and a network model of faith formation that provides a way to engage all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood. The eight practices include:

1. Adult faith formation *is life-stage/generational*—addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of adulthood; and *intergenerational*—engaging adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in the intergenerational faith experiences.

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

3. Adult faith formation addresses the *diverse* life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

4. Adult faith formation provides a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

   • Adult faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces.
   • Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments— self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world—in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.
   • Adult faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning.

5. Adult faith formation recognizes that learning and growth is a *process of active inquiry* with initiative residing in the adult learner, and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.

6. Adult faith formation provides the opportunity for *personalized and customized* learning and faith growth, giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Adults are guided by trusted mentors who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning and spiritual needs.

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

8. Adult faith formation intentionally nurtures *communities of learning and practice* around shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

Chapter 2 by Ed Gordon exams the development of the modern concept and practice of adult education and faith formation by first exploring adulthood—the modern movement of adult education through several important contributors, theories of adult development, generational studies of adults, and then exploring the goals and key approaches.

Chapter 3 by Kyle Oliver explores young adulthood—adults in their twenties and thirties—single and married. Young adulthood encompasses the years of "emerging adulthood" (18–29)—a time of significant change and transition, the early years of marriage, and the beginning of parenting. In American society today, the young adult stage of adulthood corresponds to the millennial generation. (As of 2015, the oldest millennials are thirty-five years old and the youngest in the later years of high school.) The chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspectives on young adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Chapter 4 by Jim Merhaut explores midlife adulthood—adults in their forties and fifties. Midlife adulthood is a complex time that is marked both by stability and mastery of life, and by chaos and uncertainty. Midlife adults are in the midst of their most productive professional years. Many are engaged in the joys and demands of family life and tending to the needs of their children. But they are also at a crossroads. They have lived about half as long as they will live, and this realization can have a profound impact on midlife adults. The chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspectives on midlife adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Chapter 5 by Janet Schaeffler explores mature adulthood—adults in their later fifties through early seventies. This is a new stage of adulthood between midlife

adults and older adults brought about by a longer life span as people live into the eighties and nineties and by the aging of the baby boom generation. In the United States today, Americans over sixty-five now outnumber teenagers by nearly two to one. We are witnessing the emergence of a new stage of life between adult midlife—typically focused on career and child rearing—and old age, tradition- ally marked by increasing frailty and decline. This new stage of life spans several decades and is characterized by generally good health, relative financial stability, and an active, engaged lifestyle. The chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspectives on mature adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Chapter 6 by Dorothy Linthicum explores older adulthood—adults in their mid 70s and older. She presents a portrait of older adults that includes those seventy-five to eighty-four who rarely see themselves as "old" and are still active and involved with their families, communities, and churches; and those who are eighty-five and older—proportionately the fastest-growing segment of the total population today. Most in this grouping are radically different than they were, not only in middle age, but also in their "young old age." Their growth rate is twice that of those sixty-five and over and almost four times that for the total popula- tion. In the United States, this group now represents 10 percent of the older popu- lation and will more than triple by 2050. The chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspectives on older adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Chapter 7 by Tom Zanzig describes his vision of *community-based spiritual transformation* that is focused the lived experience of adults' spiritual journey. He proposes a number of strategies and techniques that help adults name, reflect upon, and share with trusted others their lives as disciples of Jesus. This chapter summarizes the foundational principles and components of the model Tom has developed and answers questions such as: What will that mean in terms of our actual programming? What does a "spiritual transformation model" of adult faith formation look like in the real world? How can we implement the model in a congregation?

Chapter 8 by John Roberto presents ten guides for developing adult faith for- mation programming that reflect current research and practice in adult learning and faith formation and the key features of twenty-first century faith formation presented in chapter 1, and that apply to all of the seasons of adulthood. The ten guides serve as a foundation for designing adult faith formation programs, activi- ties, and resources in physical and online spaces:

1. Focus on the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood.

2. Target the spiritual and religious diversity of adults.

3. Offer a wide variety of programming to address the diversity of adults' lives.

4. Use multiple environments for programming.

5. Enhance participation in programming by building on adult motivation and principles for effective adult learning.

6. Design online and digitally enabled strategies into all programming.

7. Develop programming around the essential eight faith-forming processes.

8. Incorporate intergenerational programming into adult faith formation.

9. Address the needs of families in each season of adulthood.

10. Design missional initiatives to reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.

Chapter 9 by John Roberto presents a planning process designed to bring to life twenty-first century adult faith formation—the holistic vision of faith and faith-forming processes, the eight practices or features of twenty-first century faith formation, and a network model of faith formation that provides a way to reach all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood. The design process includes twelve steps for developing adult faith formation in a network model:

Step 1. Prepare a statement of your church's vision and goals for adult faith formation.
Step 2. Develop a profile of adult faith formation.
Step 3. Research your target audience and identify needs.
Step 4. Build the adult faith formation network design.
Step 5. Generate programming for the adult faith formation network.
Step 6. Design a season of adult faith formation programming.
Step 7. Build the digital platform—an adult faith formation website.
Step 8. Design a process for assessing and personalizing learning.
Step 9. Test the seasonal plan and web design.
Step 10. Launch the adult faith formation network.
Step 11. Evaluate the season of adult faith formation programming.
Step 12. Design the new season of adult faith formation programming.

Our hope is that *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* makes it possible for every congregation to engage young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults in faith-forming and life-transforming experiences that enrich and equip them for a lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth.

The Writing Team

Editor: John Roberto of LifelongFaith Associates is editor of the *Lifelong Faith* journal and works as a consultant to churches and religious organizations, teaches courses and conducts workshops in faith formation, and has authored books and program manuals in faith formation. John also works on the Vibrant Faith team as special projects coordinator. His latest publications include *Reimaging Faith Formation for the 21st Century*; *Generations Together: Caring, Celebrating, Learning, Praying, and Serving Faithfully* (coauthored); *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith*; and *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners*.

Edmund F. Gordon is the former Secretary for Catholic Education and the Director of Religious Education of the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware. He has been the president of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL) and served as the project manager and executive producer of the video-based catechist formation program called Echoes of Faith (RCL-Benziger) since its beginnings in the 1990s. He is a lifetime adult religious educator and has been involved in international adult religious education initiatives.

Dorothy Linthicum, an instructor at Virginia Theological Seminary, has studied and taught courses and workshops about older adult spirituality and ministry at the seminary, conferences, and dioceses. As program coordinator for the Center for the Ministry of Teaching (CMT), she shares responsibility for maintaining the physical and virtual Key Hall Resource Room and for critiquing and compiling the annual reviews of Vacation Bible School materials that are posted in late February on the CMT web pages. She continues her role as editor of *Episcopal Teacher*, a quarterly publication of the CMT.

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Kyle Oliver (@kmoliver) is the digital missioner and learning lab coordinator in the Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Theological Seminary. He is the conference coordinator for the e-Formation Conference and curates faith formation resources, models, and stories for multiple websites, including the CMT's Key Resources. He is also a board member for Forma, the Episcopal faith formation association. He is a rabid podcast listener and the host for the Easter People faith and culture podcast.

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Tom Zanzig is a freelance consultant and publisher specializing in spiritualty and adult faith formation. Tom is the author of books and resources in faith formation. He worked on the editorial and marketing teams at St. Mary's Press for twenty-five years, writing youth and adult faith formation resources, and speaking and leading workshops nationally. Over the past two decades Tom has been developing a model for understanding the dynamics of the spiritual life and developing concrete strategies for implementing it.

Seasons of Adult Faith Formation Website

www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com

The **SeasonsofAdultFaith.com** website provides a variety of resources to assist leaders in developing adult faith formation. This online resource center includes: programming ideas, articles on adult faith formation programming, case studies and examples of adult faith formation programming, links to digital resources to use in adult programming, and reproducible materials and worksheets from *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* book.

The following websites, developed by Lifelong Faith, will also be helpful in developing adult faith formation in your congregation:

21st Century Faith Formation Website (www.21stcenturyfaithformation. com) helps leaders design faith formation guided by the vision and practices in *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century.* This is a "how-to" resource with lots of practical tools to apply the concepts in the book including: curriculum models and strategies for faith formation with age groups, families, and all generations; tools and worksheets for designing faith formation curriculum; website design tools; congregational case studies; and digital media methods and interactive tools.

Curating Faith Formation Website (www.curatingfaithformation.com) provides links to digital content to use in designing curriculum and building a faith formation website for children, adolescents, adults, families, and all generations.

Intergenerational Faith Website (www.intergenerationalfaith.com) provides research on intergenerational religious transmission and faith formation, articles on

the principles and practices of intergenerational faith formation and ministry, case studies, and book resources.

Lifelong Faith Website (www.lifelongfaith.com) is the main website for information and news about LifelongFaith Associates. All of the Lifelong Faith journals are available online for download. Join the mailing list by visiting the website.

Faith Formation Learning Exchange (Sponsored by Vibrant Faith) (www.faithformationlearningexchange.net) provides a variety of resources—research studies, effective practices, cutting-edge thinking, real-world models and tools, and the latest resources—to help leaders develop Christian lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations.

imagining ||||||||||||||||||

adult faith formation

|||||||||||| **for the seasons of adulthood**

Faith Formation
for All the Seasons of Adulthood

JOHN ROBERTO

It's time for every Christian church to commit itself to developing faith formation for every season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults! We've discussed the importance of adult faith formation; we've produced official documents and vision statements; we've sponsored conferences and workshops; and we've even produced a variety of resources for adults. But to no avail. Adult faith formation remains stuck in neutral. It is the weakest ministry in most congregations—even though we are talking about everyone over eighteen years old!

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We will need new insights—drawn from research, theory, and practice—to inform us and guide the development of adult faith formation through the seasons of adulthood. We will need new approaches and practices to engage all the seasons of

an adult's life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today's world. We will need a new model of faith formation that provides a platform to reach *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community.

This chapter presents a vision of what adult faith formation can look like in the twenty-first century. It presents a holistic vision of faith and faith-forming processes, eight practices or features to guide the development of twenty-first century faith formation, and a network model of faith formation that provides a way to reach all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood.

Our focus in this chapter, and the whole book, is to bring this twenty-first century vision, set of practices, and new faith formation model to life in a congregation that commits itself to reaching and engaging *every* adult throughout the seasons of adulthood.

A Holistic Vision of Faith and Formation

Adult faith formation is guided by a holistic vision of the Christian faith as a way of the head, the heart, and the hands—informing, forming, and transforming adults in Christian faith and identity.

- *A way of the head* (inform) demands a discipleship of faith seeking understanding and belief with personal conviction, sustained by study, reflecting, discerning, and deciding, all toward spiritual wisdom for life. This requires that we educate people to know, understand, and embrace with personal conviction Christianity's core belief and values.
- *A way of the heart* (form) demands a discipleship of right relationships and right desires, community building, hospitality and inclusion, trust in God's love, and prayer and worship. This requires that we foster growth in people's identity through formation and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community.
- *A way of the hands* (transform) demands a discipleship of love, justice, peacemaking, simplicity, integrity, healing, and repentance. This requires that we foster in people an openness to a lifelong journey of conversion toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and for the life of the world (see Groome, 111–19).

This holistic vision is reflected in the documents of many Christian churches. *The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation* (Episcopal Church) describes Christian faith formation as "a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ. Lifelong Christian faith formation is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by Scripture, tradition and

reason." *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (Catholic Church) proposes three goals for adult faith formation: 1) inviting and enabling ongoing conversion to Jesus in holiness of life, 2) promoting and supporting active membership in the Christian community, and 3) calling and preparing adults to act as disciples in mission to the world. The United Church of Christ describes faith formation as "an engaged process of learning and practice integrated throughout all aspects of congregational life and daily life," a definition that combines "head" and "heart" into a more holistic understanding and embodiment.

While they may express their goals for Christian adult faith formation in different ways, it seems that most Christian churches seek to help adults:

- grow deeper in their relationship with God throughout their adult lives
- live as disciples of Jesus Christ at home, in the workplace, in the community, and in the world
- make the Christian faith a way life that gives their lives meaning and purpose and direction
- develop an understanding of the Bible and their particular faith tradition
- deepen their spiritual life and practices
- engage in service and mission to the world
- live with moral integrity guided by Christian values and ethics
- connect the Christian faith to life today
- participate in the life and ministries of their faith community

Eight Faith–Forming Processes

We can discern at least *eight essential processes of forming faith*, informed by Scripture, theology, research, and contemporary reflection that bring the holistic vision of the Christian faith to life, and promote faith growth and discipleship in adulthood (and with all age groups, families, and generations). The eight essential faith-forming processes—involving knowledge and practices of the Christian faith—facilitate faith growth *and* make a significant difference in the lives of adults. These eight faith-forming processes are central to Christian lifelong faith formation. They provide a foundation and a framework for promoting growth in faith and discipleship. The eight processes include:

- *Caring relationships.* Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and with peers in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.
- *Celebrating the liturgical seasons.* Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year as they tell the story of faith through the year in an organic and natural sequence of faith learning.
- *Celebrating rituals and milestones.* Growing in faith and discipleship by celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones that provide a way to experience

God's love through significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey.

- *Reading the Bible.* Growing in faith and discipleship by encountering God in the Bible and by studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today.
- *Learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life.* Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world.
- *Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation.* Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.
- *Serving and justice.* Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice.
- *Worshipping God.* Growing in faith and discipleship by worshipping God with the community of faith—praising God; giving thanks for God's creative and redemptive work in the world; bringing our human joys and dilemmas to God; experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission.

Features of Twenty–First Century Adult Faith Formation

From research studies, current thinking and practice in adult education and learning, and contemporary theory and practice in faith formation, we can identify eight features that provide the foundations upon which to build a twenty-first century approach to adult faith formation for all of the seasons of adulthood.

> **1.** Adult faith formation is *life-stage/generational*—addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of adulthood; and *intergenerational*—engaging adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in the intergenerational faith experiences.

Life-stage/generational adult faith formation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and faith/spiritual journeys of adults across the stages of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults. The eight faith-forming processes provide a framework for life-stage adult faith formation.

Rather than thinking about adult faith formation as religious content and programming, think of adult faith formation as the processes and practices that contribute to growth in faith and discipleship—a far more dynamic approach than a content-driven one. Instead of thinking of adult classes, small group studies, and large group programs, think about *processes*—how we guide adults in living Christian lives today.

A comprehensive and holistic approach to adult faith formation promotes discipleship and faith growth through the eight faith-forming processes with developmentally- and generationally-appropriate knowledge, experiences, and practices. The eight faith-forming processes provide a framework to guide the development of adult faith formation across the seasons of adulthood and a focus for designing new adult programs and activities, as well as redesigning current programming.

Faith-Forming Processes	Young Adults	Midlife Adults	Mature Adults	Older Adults
Caring relationships: intergenerational and peer relationships, supportive communities				
Celebrating the liturgical seasons: feasts and seasons of the church year				
Celebrating rituals and milestones: celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones at significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey				
Reading the Bible: studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today				
Learning the Christian tradition: learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality, and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world				
Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation: personal and communal prayer, being formed by the spiritual disciplines				
Serving and justice: living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice				
Worshipping God with the faith community: experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist, and being sent forth on mission				

Intergenerational faith formation provides whole-community experiences and learning, focused on the central events of church life and the Christian faith. "Throughout Scripture there is a pervasive sense that all generations were typically present when faith communities gathered for worship, for celebration, for feasting, for praise, for encouragement, for reading of Scripture, in times of danger, and for support and service. . . . To experience authentic Christian community and reap the unique blessings of intergenerationality, the generations must be together regularly and often—infants to octogenarians" (Allen & Ross, 84).

Intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences form and deepen Christian identity and commitment as adults develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and live the Christian tradition and way of life; and strengthen relationships, connections, and community across generations and enhance adults sense of belonging in the faith community.

This is the recognition that congregations themselves teach. People learn by participating in the life of a community. Practices of faith are taught through the interrelationships of worship, learning, service, ritual, prayer, and more. Among the events central to the Christian community are the feasts and seasons of the church year, Sunday worship and the lectionary, sacramental and ritual celebrations, holidays and holydays, works of justice and acts of service, times of prayer, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. For example:

- *The feasts and seasons of the church year* provide a natural rhythm and calendar to the curriculum: Advent and Christmas seasons, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lenten season, Holy Week, Easter, Easter season, Pentecost, All Saints and All Souls, and remembrances of saints and holy people throughout the year.
- The *Revised Common and Catholic Lectionaries* provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its three-year cycle of weekly readings from the Old Testament, psalms, epistles, and gospels built around the seasons of the church year. The *Narrative Lectionary* is a four-year cycle of readings from September through May each year following the sweep of the biblical story, from creation through the early Christian church.
- *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life: baptism, confirmation, first Bible, first communion, graduation, marriage, funerals, and much more.
- *Acts of service and justice*—locally and globally—provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teachings on service, justice, and care for the earth.

Congregations can design adult faith formation that connects life-stage/generational programming for adults with their engagement in the intergenerational life and events of the faith community. For example:

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

Faith-Forming Processes	Adult Life-Stage/ Generational Programming	Connection to Church Life and Events
Caring relationships: intergenerational and peer relationships, supportive communities		
Celebrating the liturgical seasons: feasts and seasons of the church year		
Celebrating rituals and milestones: celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones at significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey		
Reading the Bible: studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today		
Learning the Christian tradition: learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality, and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world		
Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation: personal and communal prayer; being formed by the spiritual disciplines		
Serving and justice: living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice		
Worshipping God with the faith community: experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission		

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

Missional faith formation focuses on the lives of adults who are spiritual but not religious or unaffiliated and uninterested in religion (adults who are "unchurched" and "de-churched"). We know from research about the growing number of unaffiliated (the "nones") especially in the younger generations (millennials and Gen Xers) and the growing number of older adults (boomers) who are leaving established Christian churches after a lifetime of participation (the "dones").

First, missional faith formation expands and extends the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live—engaging with them around their life situation (needs, interests, concerns), their quest for meaning and purpose in life, their drive to make a difference in world and in lives of others, and more. This first type of missional activity provides a safe environment for people to explore life-centered and spiritual-centered activities. Missional faith formation can reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested by using adaptable strategies, such as the following:

- Develop community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
- Create a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page to connect with people.
- Connect with adults' life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
- Connect with adults during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, retirements, and more.
- Develop high quality, relationship-building events designed to draw adults from the wider community into relationships with adults in the church such as social events, concerts, service projects, and more.
- Organize small groups on a variety of themes from life centered to faith centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
- Sponsor community-wide service days and service projects—just for adults or make it multigenerational.

Second, missional faith formation provides pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community. Missional faith formation guides people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment. The catechumenal process (RCIA in the Catholic Church) offers one pathway with its ritual stages and formational content—participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation, development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. Programs like *The Alpha Course* and *Living the Questions* offer other pathways by covering the basics of Christianity through a multisession course in a supportive small group environment.

3. Adult faith formation addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

Adult faith formation is focused on the lives of adults—their unique life tasks, situations, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys across the four distinct stages of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults. While this may sound self-evident, it is not. So much of adult faith formation is developed from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determine the content and programming and deliver it to adults. In the twenty-first century the diversity of the seasons of adulthood makes this approach ineffective. Adult faith formation is *person centered,* not content or program centered. *The content, experiences, programs, methods, and delivery systems are designed around the lives of the adults.*

Adult faith formation addresses the whole life of adults—social, ethnic/cultural, psychological, physical, spiritual, religious, and more. Consider the live of adults through the lens of the following five categories. (Chapters 3 through 6 present profiles of each stage of adulthood through these five lens.)

1. *Life stage.* What's happening in the lives and world of young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults today: developmental life tasks, family life, work life, leisure, relationships, sexuality, suffering and grief, social and political issues, community issues, and more?

2. *Generational.* What is the generational identity and the unique generational characteristics and needs of millennials (young adults), Generation X (midlife adults), baby boomers (mature adults), and builders (older adults)?

3. *Milestones and transitions.* What are the significant milestones and transitions in the lives of adults: marriages, births, graduations, geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, launching children and empty nests, retirement, unanticipated illness, divorce, loss of loved ones, and more?

4. *Ethnic/cultural life.* What are the unique lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of adults within the ethnic/cultural communities represented in the congregation and wider community? What are the unique faith traditions and practices of adults in these ethnic/cultural communities?

5. *Spiritual and religious journeys.* What are the significant spiritual and religious needs, interests, and concerns at each stage of adulthood? What are the unique characteristics and needs of adults across the spectrum of faith and practice—from adults who are growing in faith and actively engaged in the church community to adults who are spiritual but not religious and not involved in the church community to adults who are unaffiliated from established religion?

Adulthood is a time of change and transition, rather than continuity and sameness. Of particular importance to adult faith formation is the kind of transitions, developmental tasks, and changes in personal meaning that mark the journey of adulthood. Understanding the many ways adults change and grow alerts us to the dynamics of adult Christian growth. Diane Tickton Shuster notes how important times of transitions and change are in the lives of adults.

> Adulthood is filled with transitions: geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, empty nests, unanticipated illness, divorce, and the loss of loved ones. In times of transition, most people experience feelings of disorientation and tend to question personal priorities; they may seek to "finish unfinished business" or develop new dimensions of their lives. More often than not, adults in transition perceive educational institutions as important resources during times of change. They look to education to acquire new meaning perspectives and frameworks that can help them regain "order and stability" in their lives (Schuster 2003b, 10).

Addressing the needs of people in transition provides important opportunities for adult faith formation by bringing a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing. "Recognize that these transitions may prompt a hunger for learning and provide study opportunities that are responsive to immediate concerns. As adults begin to study, their new learning may lead them to new questioning and unanticipated changes in the views of self and world. Offer to sustain people through these times of upheaval by provide a steady presence in the lives" (Schuster 2003a, 37).

A challenge for congregations and adult religious educators is to be on the lookout for adults who are experiencing transition and change and offer to help them chart a course of learning that can help them find meaning in their lives. This means helping adults assess what they want and need, and showing them where to find programs, support, and resources for their continuing Christian growth.

> **4.** Adult faith formation provides a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

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

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

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

1. on your own/self-directed

2. with a mentor

3. at home

4. in small groups

5. in large groups

6. in the congregation

7. in the community and world

A variety of learning methods can be used with each of these seven learning environments. Creating this variety of learning environments is aided by the development of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the faith formation offerings.

Adult faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning. Informal learning describes a lifelong process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge from daily experience and the educational influences and resources in their environment, from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library, the mass media, and the Internet. Informal learning can be intentional or not. There might be a teacher, but it's probably a colleague or friend. We might read an article or book, visit a website, listen to a podcast, or watch a video online. We might visit Home Depot or Lowe's for a clinic on home repair or gardening or stop by our local bookstore or library for a reading group or special program. We might go online to access any one of the thousands of "how to" videos on YouTube. We might watch one of the TV channels devoted to informal learning, such as cooking channels that teach people how to cook, try new recipes, etc., or home improvement shows that present examples and teach techniques.

Formal and informal learning can be *intentional*—when an individual aims to learn something and goes about achieving that objective or *unexpected*—when in the course of everyday activities an individual learns something that he or she had not intended or expected. Most faith formation programs are formal and intentional learning. We can expand *informal* and *intentional* faith formation when we make available a variety online activities, print resources, audio podcasts, videos, apps, and more that people can access on their own, anytime, anywhere.

The literature on the characteristics of adult learners provides rich insight to what matters to adults when they engage in learning activities. As adults strive to become independent, self-directing, and competent, they thrive in environments that help them to transform their perspective and feel empowered to effect change in their lives. *Adult learners are diverse and require learning programs that accommodate the full spectrum of learning needs, styles, and preferences.* This means that adult faith formation needs to:

- Utilize adults' experience and prior knowledge. Adults learn best from their own experiences. Adults bring relevant religious knowledge and life experiences to a learning program. They need the opportunity to build on their knowledge, as well as to learn from each other. Adults use their knowledge from years of experience as a filter for new information that can function as a catalyst or barrier to learning something new.
- Respect the variety of learning styles of adults with a diversity of learning experiences, recognizing that some people learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences, some through reflective observation, some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts, and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices. (See *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* by David Kolb.)
- Recognize the multiple intelligences of adults (linguistic, spatial, musical, logical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist) and use learning methods and offer programs, activities, and resources that address the variety of intelligences. (See the work of Howard Gardner.) While it may be difficult to incorporate all eight intelligences in a particular program or activity, offer programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different "intelligences"—one that is word-centered, another musical, another visual, and so forth.
- Incorporate activities that are realistic and that involve, stimulate thinking, and challenge adults.
- Incorporate real-life application of learning. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it. Providing ways for adults to practice what they are learning promotes the transfer of learning into to their daily lives.

> **5.** Adult faith formation recognizes that learning and growth is a process of active inquiry with initiative residing in the adult learner and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.

A core principle of adult learning and faith formation is that *learning is a process of active inquiry with initiative residing in the adult learner.* Adults prefer to determine their *own* learning and faith formation experiences. The traditional model of schooling has conditioned adults to perceive the proper role of learners as being dependent on teachers to make decisions for them as to what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it has been learned. Today's adults are accustomed to searching out what they want to know, when they want and need to know it. People are becoming more and more self-directed in their learning,

and they have almost unlimited access to information through the Internet and the wide variety of print and media learning resources available in our society today.

As learning becomes a process of active inquiry, where the initiative resides within the person, intrinsic motivation becomes a key factor in determining whether or not people will engage in faith formation and open themselves to learning and faith growth. Drawing on decades of scientific research on human motivation, Daniel Pink in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* exposes the mismatch between what research shows and how we motivate people. While carrots and sticks (policies and requirements) worked somewhat successfully in the twentieth century, assembly-line model, that's precisely the wrong way to motivate people today. He describes three types of motivation: Motivation 1.0 presumed that humans were biological creatures, struggling for survival. Motivation 2.0 presumed that humans responded to reward and punishments in their environment. Motivation 3.0 presumes that humans have a third drive—to learn, to create, and to better the world. Motivation 3.0 has three essential elements.

- *Autonomy:* the desire to direct our own lives with autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), team (who they do it with), and technique (how they do it).
- *Mastery:* the urge to get better and better at something that matters—to be engaged in deliberate practice to produce mastery.
- *Purpose:* the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves, to seek purpose—a cause greater and more enduring than ourselves.

Daniel Pink writes, "The secret to high performance and satisfaction—at work, at school, and at home—is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world" (145).

Research studies on adult learning point to motivation as a key factor in determining whether or not adults will participate in an adult faith formation offering. *The key motivation in adult learning is that adults are motivated to learn and grow as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.* The research tells us to be aware of a variety of adult motivations and design activities that utilize these motivational factors.

- Adults are motivated when facing life transitions. They seek learning and support to cope with changes in their lives that give rise to new developmental tasks, e.g., raising children, aging parents, financial matters, job changes, divorce, and so forth.
- Adults are motivated when there is a gap between their present level of understanding, skill, performance and/or growth and the desired level or goal that they set for themselves or their organization or community expects of them.

- Adults are motivated by appealing to personal and spiritual growth and/or personal benefits.
- Adults are motivated when they identify they have a need to learn.
- Adults are motivated when the benefits of a learning experience outweigh their resistance.
- Adults are motivated when programs are enjoyable and enriching.
- Adults are motivated when they have the opportunity to do something they could not do before.
- Adults are motivated by settings that have a natural, interactive, communal feel.
- Adults are motivated when programs are sensitive to their time constraints by keeping commitments short in terms of duration and offering choices of times for participation.

Studies of motivation show that adults bring diverse attitudes and expectations to their learning experiences. We can identify at least four different orientations for learning: a *goal-orientation* in which learning is seen as leading to a change in work or personal status, an *activity-orientation* in which participants' social interactions are especially valued, *a learning-orientation* in which a love of learning underlies the learner's engagement and participation, and a *spiritual-orientation* in which learners seek new meaning and perceive education as the starting point for thinking in new ways (Schuster & Grant).

> **6.** Adult faith formation provides the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Adults are guided by trusted mentors who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning and spiritual needs.

We know from learning sciences research that more effective learning will occur if each person receives a customized learning experience. People learn best when they are placed in a learning environment that is sensitive to their learning needs and flexible enough to adapt strategies and resources to individual needs. We can now meet people at the point of their spiritual, religious, and learning needs and offer personalized pathways for faith growth.

Adult faith formation, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, can guide people in creating their own personal learning pathways. Churches can develop processes for diagnosing adult religious and spiritual learning needs (online and in person) that help adults:

- discern their learning needs
- create a plan (with a mentor/guide) for faith growth and find faith formation resources, programs, and activities
- engage in faith formation experiences
- reflect on their learning with a mentor/guide or small group
- identify new needs for growth and learning

A "faith-growth learning plan" helps adults identify where they are on their spiritual journey, what they need for continuing their growth, who else might share that need, and the resources that could help them meet that need. Giving power to adults to shape their own learning does not mean abandoning them to their own devices. Congregations can provide mentors or guides to assist people in developing their growth plan, accessing the programs and resources that fit their plan, and evaluating their learning.

The Flow of Personalized Learning
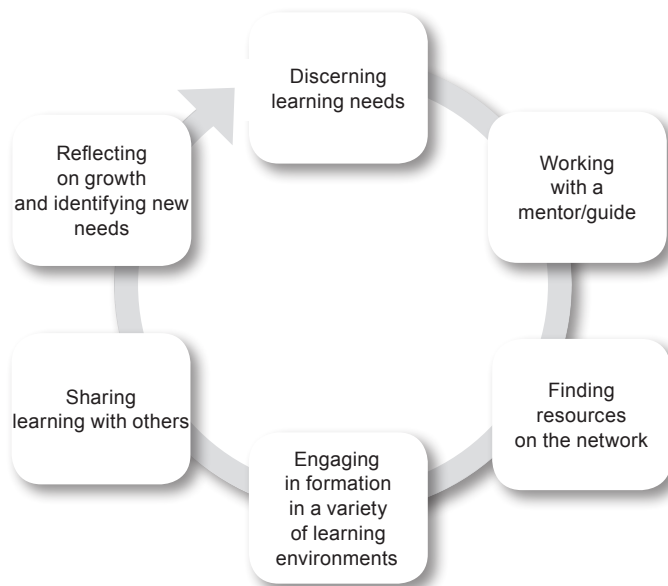
Discerning learning needs

Working with a mentor/guide

Finding resources on the network

Engaging in formation in a variety of learning environments

Sharing learning with others

Reflecting on growth and identifying new needs

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

The digital revolution has transformed almost every aspect of society. No facet of this revolution has more potential than its ability to change the way people learn. The availability of a vast array of knowledge and resources at the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen, together with the ability to connect instantaneously with peers and mentors across the street and around the world, make possible completely new learning environments and experiences. These opportunities are highly engaging and collaborative, and they are based on learners' own interests and strengths. People can truly learn anytime, anyplace, and at any pace today.

We have never had access to better technologies and resources for nurturing growth in Christian faith with all ages and equipping adults to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today. Today we can utilize the abundance of new digital technologies and media for adult learning and faith formation, and the abundance of high quality digital religious content and experiences, found in websites, blogs, apps, e-books, video, and much more.

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

An adult faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering adult faith formation experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources to engage people in learning and faith formation. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive providers of adult faith formation, but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to adults and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere.

A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online.

The technological and skill barriers for building a digital platform continue to decrease with the availability of drag and drop website builders like Weebly (www.Weebly.com), Wix (www.Wix.com), and Squarespace (www.squarespace.com). For more advanced website building there is WordPress (www.wordpress.com) with its thousands of templates and plug-ins.

Adult faith formation can used blended models of faith formation to connect physical settings and online settings. The new digital tools, digital media, and online platforms connect adult participation in church life with daily life *and* can reach adults at home, at work, and other places with personalized and customized faith formation content and experiences. Adult faith formation today can integrate online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum

ONLINE ⟷ FACE-TO-FACE

Fully Online	Mostly Online	Online & Gathered	Gathered & Online Content	Gathered with Online Content
An online program with all learning done online and limited face-to-face, gathered learning settings	A mostly online program with opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings	Online learning focused on presenting the content of the program *combined with* face-to-face, gathered sessions using active learning methods to discuss, practice and apply the content	A gathered event or program that provides online content and activities to extend and expand the learning from the gathered program	A gathered event or program that uses online content as part of the design of the event or program
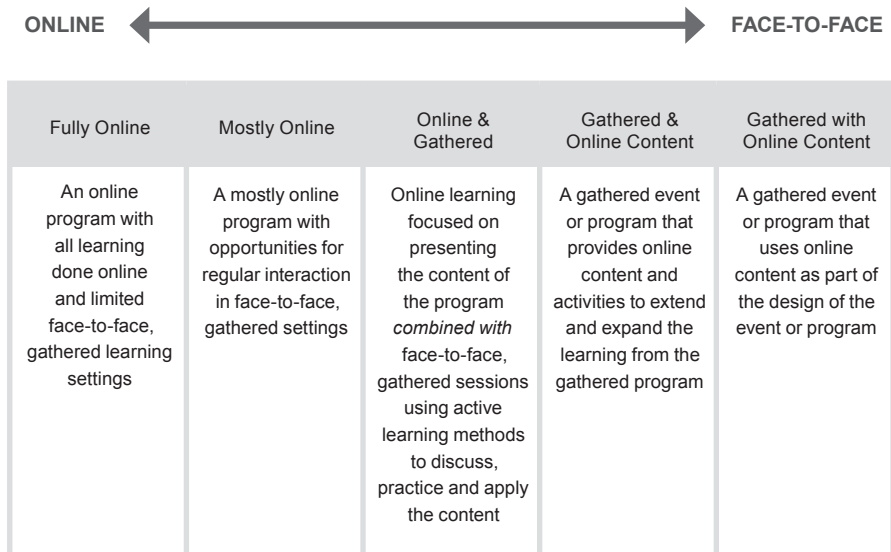
Imagine the possibilities for utilizing the five blended strategies in designing new programming, redesigning existing programming, surrounding events and programs with online content, and selecting a variety of digital programs, activities, and resources that can be used alone (fully online) or used in conjunction with face-to-face programs.

Gathered with Online Content

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

Gathered and Online Content

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

Online and Gathered

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

Mostly Online

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

Fully Online

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

> **8.** Adult faith formation intentionally nurtures communities of learning and practice around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

Adult faith formation can connect adults to each other through communities of practice—groups of people who have a shared interest, passion, religious or spiritual need, life stage—who come together to learn with and from each other. William Synder describes communities of practice having three dimensions: "the domain (what it's about); the topic (the issues that they are facing); and the community (the people who are involved)." Communities of practice use a variety of approaches to connect, such as face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, video conferencing, social networking, working on projects together. It is a mix of formal and informal methods. Some of them are online; some of them are face-to-face. Some of them happen weekly; some of them happen monthly or yearly.

With a diversity of programs and activities targeted to different needs and life stages, groups can form naturally as adults connect with others around shared interests, passions, needs, or life stage. Participation in these groups and their shared activities develop relationships, provide a supportive community, and promote learning and the application of that learning in practice. Congregations can encourage the natural development of communities of learning and practice around these shared activities. This is a different approach from the churches that adopt a small group model of church and then organize people into small groups. Oftentimes this approach can feel artificial and contrived. The formation of communities of practice can be self-organizing around activities that reflect their interests, passions, hungers, or needs.

A congregation is a community of practice. Practices like worship, liturgy, pastoral care, outreach, and social justice are important to the congregation's vitality. Churches want people who are passionate about those practices to develop them so that they are thriving in the congregation. An example would be people in a congregation who are engaged in justice and service projects—in the church and

in the world—who could regularly connect, and even meet, to share their reflections and insights, communicate their insights to the whole congregation, and continue to support each other in their efforts. They can also invite new people to join their efforts. A community of practice around social justice could include not only church members, but also people in the wider community who have similar interests.

Imagine a group forming around a Bible study offering on the faith formation network. They may do this in a small group, but they are engaged in a larger community of practice in their congregation or in the world focused on reading and studying the book. People in the small group connect, face-to-face and/or online, to study the Bible together and to learn how to apply the Bible in their daily lives. They can connect with other groups, via social media, to share their experience of learning and practice. They can share their learning with the whole congregation, providing an opportunity for everyone to grow in their understanding of the Bible.

Most of the skills and expertise we learn, we learn from others in practice. We don't learn it in a course or book. It's helpful to have those, but the way we really learn is in practice with other practitioners. If you have a community of practice, someone can say, "I'm calling you about what I saw on your website or on Facebook. I heard that you tried this, and I'd love to talk to you about it." Communities of practice can connect people and diffuse learning and Christian practices across the congregation. Adult faith formation can cultivate and support communities of practices around particular topics or issues or Christian practices.

A New Approach: A Network of Adult Faith Formation

We are witnessing transformations in the way we think about learning, reflecting the convergence of new technologies, digital media and tools, and network thinking. We are shifting from *education to learning*—digital media and technologies enable learning anywhere, anytime; from *consumption of information to participatory learning*—organized around learners' interests, enabling them to create as well as consume information; and from *institutions to networks*—where adults learn from a variety of sources in a variety of settings.

The central themes of the transformation in learning need to be central features in congregational faith formation: putting learners at the center of our thinking, enabling and trusting learners to co-creators of their learning experiences, connecting learning authentically to life concerns and real world issues, making room for new modes of learning and new methods of teaching, fostering collaboration in learning, and organizing structures around learners' needs.

So the central question for adult faith formation (and all learning and faith formation) is this: *What if learning adapted to each person instead of expecting each person to adapt to the programs offered them by institutions such as a congregation?* A network

approach provides both the resources and online platform to offer the diversity of faith formation that an adult can personalize and customize for his or her own learning needs.

Consider this: In an earlier era if you wanted to learn more about the Bible, you could take a Bible course at a fixed time—at a church, seminary, college, or other education provider, or read a book—perhaps recommended by your pastor and borrowed from your church's library, or watch a video—on VHS of course! Your options would have been limited. In the twenty-first century if you want to learn more about the Bible, your options are greatly expanded. You could do any combination of the following:

- Take a course at church or college or seminary.
- Take a course online—at a scheduled time with a group or at your own time and pace.
- Read and view videos online at a Bible website, such as www.Enterthe Bible.org from Luther Seminary.
- Join an online Bible study group at another church or on Facebook.
- Watch a video series on YouTube from a Scripture scholar, such as N.T. Wright, as you read his book or watch a video series produced by another congregation that is available for free on its website.
- Find a mentor in your community or online who will guide your self-directed Bible study.
- Listen to audio versions of your book(s) using your smartphone as you commute to work each day.
- Download a Bible study app, engage in daily Bible readings and reflections, and share your reflections with others who are studying the Bible using the app and social media.
- Create a blog to post your thoughts on what you are learning and invite others to offer their insights.
- Organize your own learning group by gathering a group of people who are interested in learning more about the Bible and using print, audio, video, and online resources to guide your small group.

In this example we see the shift to a network approach to learning. Adults now have the ability to construct their own networks of learning, utilizing a variety of new technologies and the abundance of high-quality print, audio, video, and online resources that are readily available to them. Learning networks not only provide access to a virtually endless array of learning opportunities, but can offer learners multiple points of entry that provide individualized pathways of learning and faith growth.

What if we reimagined adult faith formation as a *network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources*—in physical places and online spaces? An adult faith

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

Imagine designing an adult faith formation network for mature adults in their fifties through the early seventies with content that provides developmentally- and generationally-appropriate faith knowledge and practices. The network could engage adults intergenerationally in the life and events of the Christian community and provide adult programs and activities in a variety of settings and media formats, organized around the eight faith-forming processes and three adult-specific content areas: adult life issues, discovering faith (outreach to the "churchless"), and grandparents. (See the diagram on the next page.) Depending on the size of the adult population in a church, there could be faith formation networks for each of the four stages of adulthood or one network for all adults with specialized content for different stages.

Programming can be designed and offered in three, four-month seasons: January–April, May–August, and September–December. Following is an example of one season (January–April) that provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, and resources in physical places and online spaces, and is conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world. (For an illustration of an adult faith formation network and website go to: http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com. For more examples and resources go to: www.21stCenturyFaithFormation.com.)

Faith Formation Network for Mature Adults

Caring relationships

Grandparents

Liturgical seasons

Adult life issues

Rituals & milestones

INTERGENERATIONAL FAITH COMMUNITY

Discovering faith

Learning the tradition

Sunday worship

Praying

Service, justice, creation

Bible

Caring Relationships

- Friday Lent simple meals.
- Social gatherings for adults.
- Intergenerational experiences and programs in the church community.
- Career mentoring program between adults and young adults entering the workplace, addressing work issues, money management, career planning, living as a Christian in the workplace and world, and more.

Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

• A forty-day Lent "curriculum" that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life—delivered online through the congregation's faith formation website, including fasting activities, praying activities, service/almsgiving activities, lectionary reflections, Lent study resources and videos, Lent devotions, and daily Bible readings.

Celebrating Rituals and Milestones

• Resources for celebrating adult milestones and life transitions, such as retirement, becoming a grandparent, at home with family and friends.

Learning the Christian Tradition and Applying It to Life

• A theology book-of-the-month program with groups meeting at church, at home, in community settings, and online via web conferencing; and online content with discussion questions and links for further learning.
• January theology enrichment series: four presentations at church by guest experts on a theological theme; video recording of each presentation for online viewing and small group learning; and online resources for continuing learning.
• Online theology courses selected for individual study using offerings at colleges/seminaries and on iTunes University.
• An online theology video library of presentations on theological topics for individual or small group study.

Praying and Spiritual Formation

• Lent spiritual practices course: a five-session spiritual practices course with sessions on prayer styles and traditions, fixed-hour prayer, contemplation and meditation, spiritual reading and praying with art and music, and Sabbath.
• An online Lent retreat experience delivered daily via e-mail.
• Online prayer center with links to print, audio, video, and digital resources for daily prayer, devotions, liturgy of the hours, and more.

Reading the Bible

• A six-week Lent Bible study program organized in variety of settings with a print resource and online support materials and videos.
• Links to online resources for Bible study and a list of Bible apps for individual use.

Serving People in Need, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation

- A variety of service/mission projects—just for adults or intergenerational—already offered by justice and service organizations, which provide a range of options for service, e.g., local one-day projects, short-term mission trips of two to five days, weeklong mission trips, and global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days.
- An online justice and service center where people can learn about justice issues and the biblical and church teachings on justice, service, and care for creation.

Worshipping God within the Faith Community

- Online resources for extending Sunday worship into daily life and family life using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings and sermon, and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas, conversation activities, and more.
- "Coffee and Conversation" groups after Sunday worship to reflect on the Sunday readings using Lectio Divina.

Mature Adult Life Issues

- Programs and small groups organized around adult life tasks and issues, such as children getting married, retirement, finances in later life, caring for an aging parent, dealing with illness.
- Links to online programs and resources that address adult life tasks and issues, such www.AARP.org.
- Connection to programs sponsored by churches or community organizations on adult life issues.

Just for Grandparents

- Grandparent-grandchild programs, such as a mini-retreat program, trips, service projects, and more, organized by the church.
- Articles and materials to help grandparents understand their role in faith formation and raising their grandchildren.
- Faith-forming activities that grandparents can use with their grandchildren
- A list of recommended children's Bibles, storybooks, and video programs that grandparents can use with grandchildren.

Discovering Faith

- Sponsor a program, such as Alpha, for "churchless" adults who want to explore the Christian faith again or for the first time.
- Develop a weekly program, such as Lifetree Café, in a community setting for adults who want to connect with a community, discuss spiritual matters, and explore faith.
- Offer "reentry" experiences and mentors/guides for those who want to join the church community and need a gradual reintroduction to church life and the Christian faith.

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

Conclusion—Faith Formation for All the Seasons of Adulthood

We began with the questions: What could adult faith formation look like in the twenty-first century? What insights should inform us and guide the development of adult faith formation for the four stages of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults? How do we engage all the seasons of an adult's life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today's world? And how can we develop an approach that provides a platform for reaching *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community?

The answers to these questions can be found in the holistic vision of faith and faith-forming processes, in the eight features that can guide the development of twenty-first century faith formation, and in a network model of faith formation that provides a way to reach all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood.

Following are the key features that will guide the development of twenty-first century adult faith formation:

1. Adult Faith Formation is *life-stage/generational*—addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of adulthood; and *intergenerational*—engaging adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in the intergenerational faith experiences.

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

3. Adult faith formation addresses the *diverse* life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

4. Adult faith formation provides a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

    *   Adult faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces.
    *   Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world—in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.
    *   Adult faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning.

5. Adult faith formation recognizes that learning and growth is a *process of active inquiry* with initiative residing in the adult learner and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.

6. Adult faith formation provides the opportunity for *personalized and customized* learning and faith growth, giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Adults are guided by trusted mentors who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning and spiritual needs.

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

8. Adult faith formation intentionally nurtures *communities of learning and practice* around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

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The Development of Modern Adult Education and Faith Formation

ED GORDON

There is a growing trend for religious congregations to focus more on the education and formation of their adult members and to adopt and adapt practices that have their genesis in forms of adult education and learning. This chapter exams the development of the modern concept and practice of adult education and faith formation by first exploring adulthood—the modern movement of adult education through several important contributors, theories of adult development, generational studies of adults, and then exploring the goals and key approaches.

The Modern Movement of Adult Education

Malcolm Knowles (1913–97) is considered the father of modern adult education. In his early career he worked for the National Youth Administration and the YMCA. In 1951 he became the Executive Director of the Adult Education Association of

the United States of America. While executive director he worked on a history of adult education and noted the importance of various informal educational experiences. He also began work on developing a distinctive conceptual basis for adult education. He initiated a move to reorient adult education from "educating people" to "helping them learn." As a professor at Boston University and later at North Carolina State, he developed his concept of *andragogy,* a word that best described his understanding of adult education.

He was not the first person to use this term. It had been used occasionally since the 1830s. However, his books, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1970) and *The Adult Learner* (1973) popularized "andragogy" as a term that distinguished adult education from "pedagogy," i.e., the education of children and youth.

Knowles saw adults as more self-directed than younger learners, with a large repertoire of experiences that provide resources for learning. Adults look for more immediate application of their new learning, and the developmental tasks of social roles place a part in their motivation to learn. He also saw that adults are more focused on problem solving than studying a particular subject. Their motivation is more internal than external. His concept of self-directed learning suggested that proactive learners learn more and retain more. It also was more in tune with natural processes of psychological development, and it reflects an emphasis on the learner as opposed to the teacher.

His classic five-step model for adult education begins with a diagnosis of learning needs that is followed by formulating goals from those needs. The third step is identifying the available human and material resources. Choosing and implementing learning strategies is followed by evaluating the learning outcomes. Most people who have been engaged in adult education will recognize these steps or a variation as standard fare in developing adult formation programs.

Over the years, there have been many critiques of Knowles's model. Some have said that his approach is culturally determined. Others have noted that many of the characteristics Knowles attributes to adults are also found in children and youth, albeit in lesser degrees. Knowles was more of a pragmatic thinker who didn't construct a theory of adult education. That was left to others.

Stephen Brookfield (b. 1949) is one of the prominent critics of Knowles, especially his idea of adults being self-directed. Brookfield's life work has centered on teaching students critical and creative thinking. He has written seventeen books on various aspects of educational theory and practice and has received many honors from the international educational community. He holds the John Ireland Chair at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis.

For Brookfield, the idea of an autonomous self, operating in splendid isolation, is unrealistic. "The self in a self-directed learning project is not an autonomous, innocent self, contentedly floating free from cultural influences. It has not sprung fully formed out of a political vacuum. It is, rather, an embedded self, a self whose instincts, values, needs and beliefs have been shaped by the surrounding culture" (94).

Thus, there is the need for an educational process that helps the learner and the teacher to identify the many assumptions one brings to any learning event.

His first principle in critical thinking is to identify the assumptions behind one's thinking and acting. The second movement is to check assumptions for accuracy and validity. The final step is to take informed action. Creative thinking requires one to view ideas and practices from multiple viewpoints, being able to move from familiar mental frameworks, generating new perspectives, and communicating the new learning. This requires 1) identifying the assumptions that frame our thinking and determine our actions, 2) checking out the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid, 3) looking at our ideas and decisions (intellectual, organizational, and personal) from several different perspectives, and 4) on the basis of all this, taking informed actions. For Brookfield, an informed action is one where there is good evidence that is used to support the action.

In using critical thinking, Brookfield identifies many of the assumptions underlying an approach to learning that sees the autonomous self as both the subject and the object of learning and psychological development. Instead he proposes "a feminist valuing of interdependence and a socially constructed interpretation of the self as equally viable educational ideals and as legitimate foci for conceptualizing psychological development. Building on these foci has been a body of work on feminist pedagogy (Lather 1991; Luke and Gore 1992) that emphasizes interdependence, connectedness and the politics of nurturance (Culley and Portuges 1985)" (Brookfield, 94). He does not totally reject the idea of a self-directed learner, but wants to "pry the concept out of the slough of narcissistic, unproblematic self-actualization in which it is currently mired." He thinks there is a chance to retrieve self-direction as a key element in adult learning.

Jack Mezirow (1923–2014) taught at Columbia University and developed a theory of transformative learning in the late 1970s and 1980s. It has become a movement in education, spawning numerous conferences and symposia to discuss various aspects of his approach. Since his first articulation of the process, he has nuanced his original work over the years. Because it has been set forth as a developed theory, it has been challenged on many fronts over the last thirty-five years. Nonetheless it still holds an important place in the literature of adult education and in its practice.

Jane Regan uses the example of a meeting to identify Mezirow's different forms of knowledge or learning: technical, practical (communicative), and emancipatory learning. Each form of knowledge looks at a different aspect of a meeting. "Emancipatory learning involves moving beyond *how* to run an effective meeting (technical) and *what* makes for an effective meeting (communicative) to ask *why* this type of meeting is consider an effective one in this context and even what we mean by effective. Emancipatory learning involves a critical look at the notions of power and authority and at the structures of relationships that define and limit the way in which this particular group meets and comes to decisions" (79).

Emancipatory learning requires critical reflection that will help the learner uncover assumptions, distortions, and narrowness of vision that can keep the learner from discovering what is beyond one's limitations. There is an interrelatedness of all forms of learning. The basis for transformative learning involves questioning one's current perspective, exploring alternatives, applying the transformative perspective, and reintegrating and grounding the new perspective.

As one can imagine, a comprehensive theory of adult learning that has been developed over many years and claims to be comprehensive will provide a detailed explanation of that process. Mezirow identifies eleven steps in the transformative learning process. It always begins with a triggering event, e.g., a life crisis or major transition. However, it may also be caused by the accumulation of many smaller transformations. When such an event happens, there is the opportunity for a meaning perspective to change. A change in a meaning perspective can bring about a transformation in one's life.

Paulo Friere (1921–97) was born in Brazil. His work with the poor led to the publication of his most influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971). Freire's work greatly influenced both Brookfield and Mezirow. In *Pedagogy* he described a "banking" form of education where the teacher deposits knowledge, which the teacher controls, into the brain of the student. The student's task is to keep the knowledge and give it back exactly as it was deposited. Freire's reflections on this kind of education and who has all the power led him to develop a different approach to education with a different goal. Education is never neutral. Friere recognized the part power plays in education. (Both Brookfield and Mezirow are sensitive to power as it informs education.) In particular he focused on how oppressors can use education to maintain the status quo. He developed a problem-posing form of education where the goal is humanization, which he identifies as humankind's vocation. In order for this to occur "this pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation" (33). This reflection will bring about *conscientization*, which is the process of developing "a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action." Action is required in order to change the social reality.

Learning from the Theorists

- The theorists ask us to examine the assumptions we have about the goals of education and learning.
- Learners need to be fully engaged in their own learning. If learning is a dynamic process, the learner cannot be passive.
- The roles of teacher and learner need to reflect an interaction where both are learners and teachers. Brookfield provides an example with his critical incident questionnaire.

- Critical thinking includes but is not limited to examining all assumptions Brookfield has three kinds of assumptions: causal, prescriptive, and paradig-matic. It is essential to all three theorists.
- The purpose of critical thinking is action/transformation.
- Learning is about change. Transformation is about change; conscientization is about change; and critical-creative thinking is about change.
- There is always a social dimension to learning. Human beings always exist in relationship to others and the world.
- One needs to be aware of the place power plays in education and learning.
- Dialogue is an important element in learning. "Without dialogue there can be no communication and without communication there can be no true education" (Friere, 81).
- Education liberates and provides for a deeper, more meaningful life.

Adult Development Theories

Beginning with Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, the last seventy years have seen psy-chologists and social scientists who have described the human journey from birth through adulthood. "Providing a language for our experiences of change, they also offer normative depictions of the telos or goals of human life" (Fowler, 11). Through observation and extensive interviews they have identified stages of growth and development. Some of the movements through various stages are related to age (Erikson, Levinson), while others (Kohlberg, Gilligan, Fowler) describe stages where age is a necessary but not sufficient cause of movement from one stage to another. These "stage theorists" suggest that they have uncovered a sequence of movements that are universal and sequential. In various ways they describe what a healthy, mature adult looks like and provide a narrative for describing how one becomes a mature adult. Over the years, adult educators have developed programs and processes targeting the needs and interests that arise at various stages in the process. Adulthood itself consists of several discrete stages rather than just one long stage. Therefore, adult education and adult formation need to be aware of different interests, needs, and challenges at various stages in the adult life cycle.

Erik Erikson (1902–94) was a German-born psychiatrist who came to the United States in the 1930s. He taught at Harvard, Yale, and USC and worked much of the time with children. In 1950 he published *Childhood and Society*, his most well-known work. In it he identifies eight psycho-social stages of life. Each stage has a "crisis" that must be negotiated and that leads to the attainment of a vir-tue. Each stage builds on the previous one and its completion depends to a certain extent on how well the earlier stage was negotiated. The three stages he identifies in adulthood are: intimacy versus isolation (early adulthood); generativity ver-sus stagnation (middle adulthood); ego integrity versus despair (older adulthood).

Almost everyone who has studied education, psychology, and many other disciplines is familiar with Erickson's stages. They continue to provide a vision of what a healthy, mature adult looks like.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–87) focused on moral reasoning. He expanded on the work of the Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, who had written about the moral development of children. Kohlberg's research technique involved extended interviews where a moral dilemma was posed and the interviewees would explain how they would decide what to do. He articulated three levels of moral reasoning each with two stages. People moved from stage to stage when they were faced with a situation (dilemma) where the old way of reasoning no longer worked. His moral development theory had great influence in the 1980s and 90s among educators who saw it as a tool for working with criminals and troubled youth as well as religious educators who saw it as a way of helping to foster growth in the moral life. It is important to note that Kohlberg was not focused on what decision was made, but the moral reasoning one used to come to that decision.

Carol Gilligan was a colleague of Kohlberg's. While working on "coding" interviews, she became aware that women's "scoring" followed a different pattern than that of men. She became convinced that women's reasoning followed a different path than the one formulated by men. (Kohlberg's initial work had been conducted with all men and boys.) In her book, *In a Different Voice,* she identifies women's moral reasoning as more focused on relationships than on duty or obligation. She called this an ethics of responsibility. She does not propose this approach to moral reasoning as better than Kohlberg's model, just different.

James Fowler (b. 1940) was a professor of theology and human development at Emory University. Building on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg, he and his associates wanted to see if "faith" also had a sequence of stages in the human journey. In 1981 he published *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning.* In this book and several successive books, he identified seven stages of growth in faith. Faith, for Fowler, is a human universal, broader than, but encompassing religious faith. It involves trust and loyalty in the face of the ambiguities of life and in the search for meaning. It is beyond the scope of this survey to articulate Fowler's findings. He was sensitive to the facile labeling of persons so unlike Kohlberg, he used technical terms for the stages rather than easily remembered identifiers.

In a paper written more than thirty years after the first publication of his faith development theory, he summarized his perception of the influence his theory had on various religious groups.

Catholic theology's anthropology, while it acknowledges original sin, builds on a Thomistic trust in the power of reason, informed by faith, to help discipline and offset the corrosive effects of the Fall. Catholic teaching on ethics also relies on notions of natural law. The same soil that made Kohlberg's work on moral reasoning appealing to Catholic educators made them hopeful that the stages of faith,

identified in our research and employed in parochial schools, could provide a map that would include and expand approaches in education for the moral and faith development of children, youth, and adults.

Among Protestants, faith development theory received a decidedly more mixed evaluation. Perhaps the strongest interest in the implications of faith development theory came from traditions that emphasized the rational potential of human persons and communities, if they were rightly socialized, and if their capacities for moral reasoning were nurtured by precept and example. Unitarian Universalists, in particular, were drawn to faith development theory and research. United Methodists and liberal Baptists, along with Episcopalians, Disciples of Christ, and Reform Jews, also recognized the stages' sequence of developmental moves as empirically sound and useful for teaching. However, they rightly expressed caution that human rationality is "fallen" and prone to self-deception and moral complacency (Fowler, *Faith Development at 30*, 411).

There have been several critics of Fowler, among them Craig Dykstra, Maria Harris, and others who have provided valuable critiques and challenges to his faith development theory. However, it does provide a tool for looking at the dynamics of faith in the lives of actual persons and should not be easily dismissed. Fowler says, "Human development toward wholeness is, I believe, always the product of a certain synergy between human potentials, given in creation, and the presence and activity of Spirit as mediated through many channels" (Fowler, 2004, 59).

Kenneth Stokes conducted a national project "Faith Development through the Life Cycle" in the 1980s and published *Faith Is a Verb: The Dynamics of Faith Development*. His found that faith development is not significantly related to age; it does not differ qualitatively by sex, although men's and women's approaches to faith development are subtly different; and there is a positive correlation between psycho-social health and faith development.

The Rise of Emerging Adulthood

This information on developmental theory has attempted to show that adulthood is not unitary, but has several stages of development within it. Yet, there are certain aspects of these divisions that people often assume make up adulthood. Among them are completing one's education, getting married, getting a stable job, and settling down. To a greater or lesser degree, these are assumptions about what it means to become an adult in today's society.

Over the past forty years, a number of shifts in the national and global culture have led to these characteristics being delayed into the thirties. Today, more people attend post-secondary education and more pursue post-graduate education. Along with the education, they acquire a significant amount of debt. Since 1970 the age of marriage for both women and men has moved back at least five years. The economy has made it more and more difficult for young graduates to move

into career-oriented jobs. Instead, they move among a number of low-paying jobs before achieving stability and good-paying positions. Finally, parents are willing to assist their children in these years. One only needs to think about the fact that parents can now keep their children on their health plans to age twenty-six to see how this works. The twenty something living in the basement has become a common phenomenon.

The implications of these trends mean that young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty are not achieving the traditional tasks associated with moving into mature adulthood. "During this time frame, emerging adults experience a freedom that is historically unparalleled, a life structure that is often at most only loosely governed by older adult authorities. This enables emerging adults for many years to explore, experiment, discover, succeed or fail, move on, and try again" (Smith, 280).

Based on these trends, a number of social scientists have begun to speak of Emerging Adulthood as a distinct stage of life with its own unique characteristics and with implications for all forms of adult education.

Learning from the Developmental Theorists

- Adulthood is not unitary or static, but consists of stages of growth and development.
- Developmental stages are a way to identify the needs of adults as they move through life.
- Development stages provide a picture of healthy, mature adulthood. Developmental theorists emphasize that stages are not meant to label people or to identify one stage as "better" than another.
- Development theories provide insights for developing adult faith formation strategies. For example, crises and transitions in adulthood provide an openness in adults to explore and grow in their faith.
- Developmental stage theory presents a different way of understanding learners and how we can structure learning events to facilitate movement from one stage to another.

Generational Studies

A generation can be understood in terms of family or in terms of a larger group (cohort). It is in the latter sense that the sociologist Karl Mannheim began using the term in the 1920s. When it is used to describe a larger group, it usually means that a group of persons born in certain years will develop a common view of the world based on common experiences and interactions with the dominant culture, usually appropriated in the late teens and early twenties. Many times there

is a defining event or events in a generation that shapes their common experience, e.g., a war, the Depression, and so forth. Each generation encompasses about twenty years, more or less. As one can imagine, there are several years of overlap among the generations where there is a blending of the prior and present views of the world. While there is a natural tendency for one to become more conservative, more careful as one grows older, generational theory holds that members of a cohort will still look at the world through the lenses of their cohort.

In the United States, both academic sociologists and popular writers describe five generations of living Americans: the builder generation born before 1946; baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X from 1964 to 1980; the millennial generation from 1981 to 1999, and the iGeneration from 2000 to the present. Here are several characteristics of the adult generations.

Builder generation (born before 1946). The identity of this generation was forged in the Depression and WWII. They have been called the "greatest generation." They achieved a great deal and suffered a great deal. They built the foundations for the United States emerging as an economic, political, and military power. They lived with segregation but created the civil rights movement. They lived with Joe McCarthy but eventually supported free speech. As a group they are team players, loyal to institutions, and extremely patriotic. They don't question authority. The have strong bonds to institutions.

Baby boomers (born 1946–64). They were the largest generation to date, born in the decades after WWII. They were indelibly marked by the change and turmoil of the 1960s—the Vietnam War, civil rights, drugs, music, the Pill, protest, Watergate, Kent State, feminism, divorce, the assassinations of JFK, MLK, and RFK—that shaped the world view of this generation. While boomers may still hold some more traditional views of their parent's generation, they have a less strong bond of affiliation to all institutions.

Generation X (born 1965–80). The children of the boomers (and younger builders) are heirs to the discoveries and sins of their parent's generation. They are a smaller generation than either the boomers or millennials. They were "children of divorce"—the first generation who experienced the surge in divorce rates. They were the "latchkey children"—with both parents working outside the home or with a single parent working full time. Consequently, they were on their own a lot, and often feeling a sense of abandonment. It's no surprise they have been labeled "helicopter" parents because of their concern and attachment with their children today. They have a lower identification with churches, government, and other institutions than their parents. They are well educated (60 percent attended college).

Millennials (born 1981–99). They are one of America's largest generations and most racially diverse. A Pew Research article, "Detached from Institutions and Networked with Friends," describes millennials this way: "Now ranging in age from 18 to 33, they are relatively unattached to organized politics and religion,

linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry—and optimistic about the future." Three in ten say they are not affiliated with any religion. Just 26 percent are married—10 percent less than the Gen Xers, 22 percent less than boomers, and 39 percent less than the builder generation at similar ages. This is the generation that grew up with the Internet. They are the true digital natives.

Robert Wuthnow in *After the Boomers: How Twenty-and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* points out that the four tasks emerging adults are not accomplishing—completing education, getting married, having children, settling down to a more permanent job—are exactly the tasks that have been historically necessary for someone to join a religious congregation. Thus, the fact that all churches seem to have few millennials in the congregations may be, at least, in part due to them not having achieved these tasks.

Learning from Generational Studies

- Each generation has a unique identity and distinct characteristics.
- There is significant overlap at the ends of each generation.
- Adult programs will not appeal to members of all generations.
- Adult educators can shape programs that meet the needs of particular generations.

The Goals of Adult Faith Formation

Discipleship at the Heart of Adult Faith Formation

The term *disciple* is used more than two hundred times in the New Testament. The word itself means "a learner." It identifies those whom Jesus met and who were changed by this encounter. It identifies those who wanted to learn more from and about Jesus. It identifies those who were filed with the Holy Spirit. "Looking cumulatively at the evangelists' accounts of the life of Jesus and his encounter, we can identify three stages of discipleship, or three steps that can move a person from going his or her own way to following the way of Jesus, the Way of discipleship. These are 1) the call or encounter itself, 2) the disturbance or displacement it creates, and 3) the resulting sending forth or commissioning" (Gittens, 10). Each of the Christian communities has a different way of interpreting each of these stages, but all would agree that forming disciples is at the heart of adult faith formation. It is also important to point out that while the call to discipleship is always personal, it is never individual. The disciple is called by a community and in a community. Disciples are not Lone Rangers but members of the Body of Christ. Adult faith formation always stresses the communal dimensions of discipleship.

Jane Regan contends that it is "sustained, critical conversation that is constitutive of an adult evangelizing church" (Regan, 131). It is how we and the world become transformed.

Conversion to Jesus and the Christian Way of Life

Becoming a disciple involves *metanoia* or turning around one's life. In religious terms this is often referred to as conversion. The disciple turns one's life over to Jesus. Once again, church communities have different understandings of what constitutes conversion from a one-time event to a lifelong process. Underlying understandings along the entire continuum is a giving over of one's life to the living God. The Catholic tradition has retrieved the ancient process of the Catechumenate as the ordinary process for one to come to membership and discipleship. This process, a school for discipleship, emphasizes the journey of faith, the importance of Scripture, liturgy, and the community in forming disciples. It is, according to recent Catholic Church documents, the inspiration for all other forms of faith formation. Adult faith formation that promotes critical and creative thinking enables the disciple to continually examine his or her own life in light of the gospel and grow in love.

Approaches to Adult Faith Formation

Christian Practices

The words *disciple* and *discipline* come from the same root word for learning. To become a disciple one needs to practice the way of discipleship and that requires discipline. There is a revival in many traditions of retrieving various religious practices from the past and creating new ones to fit with the current realities in which we live. In an insightful article, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices*,*" Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra provide a theological way of thinking about practices. By Christian practices they "mean things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world." In a way, this understanding of Christian practice gets to the core of the perennial question: "Given what God in Jesus Christ has done for us, how should I, a Christian, live in the world?" It provides a way for linking faith and life.

The authors identify twelve arenas of practice where communities of faith have lived into responding to God's presence in the world. These practices include honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping Sabbath, discernment, testimony, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives to God. These practices when properly understood are

all part of a human whole, while at the same time they are discrete actions. However, the practice must be sustained over time and address one of the basic human needs. It is a lifelong task of critically thinking about the way we live in the world in response to and in worship of God. When adults participate in these practices, they are taking part in God's work of creation and new creation and thereby growing into a deeper knowledge of God and of creation.

Small Faith Communities

During the 1970s, a movement began, around the world, to establish small faith communities within larger church congregations and parishes. Sometimes these were called Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Early forms of these communities emerged in Latin America and then spread to Africa, Asia, and later to North America. Many of the Christian megachurches have their members meet in small groups during the week as a way to make their congregations more intimate and immediate. Though not all small groups follow the same process, the vast majority are gathered around Scripture.

These small groups of up to twelve members meet on a regular basis around the Scriptures. Many of the groups followed or adapted a methodology that came out of Lumko, the pastoral center of the South African Bishops Conference. They followed a seven step process: 1) beginning with prayer, inviting Jesus into the group, 2) followed by two readings of a Scripture passage (for churches that follow the lectionary it is often the gospel text for the coming Sunday), 3) the participants then say aloud a word or phrase that speaks to each of them and meditate on their word or phrase and then the Scripture is read again, 4) a period of silence, 5) the members of the group express what God has spoken to their hearts, 6) the group decides what action the reading is calling them to—in some groups, it is what God's word is calling each to do personally, and 7) the group shares spontaneous prayer and may end with a song or hymn. This approach to Scripture has formed deep bonds among its members and provides a source of strength that contributes to and flows from Sunday worship. This method contains within itself many of the movements of *lectio divina*, an ancient form of prayerful Scripture reading that is gaining renewed popularity.

The great challenge for congregations is to discover how to incorporate these groups into the greater congregation without stifling the Spirit that arises in the small communities. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, an umbrella organization for the Catholic Bishops Conferences of Asia, have committed themselves to developing small faith communities in all of their twenty-seven countries. It is a part of the "new way of being church." At a gathering in September of 2014, they said, "Small Christian Communities develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and that in itself is a source of joy. The encounter with God inspires a

renewed encounter with humanity. Closeness to the person of Christ reveals to us who we really are as persons."

Generational Programs

Building on the work of demographers and cultural scientists who study the unique characteristics of generations in the population, adult faith formation leaders have been devising strategies and programs to address the needs of particular generations. Adult faith formation is no longer about finding the program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with a variety of faith formation activities. It is offering faith formation programming that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing. There are a number of programs that have been developed to appeal specifically to the four adult generations in America—millennials, Gen Xers, boomers, and builders. New churches are being created as a way to reach Gen Xers and millennials who have disengaged from more traditional congregations. Programs like "Theology on Tap" take the church to where the young adults are gathering. Other programs are being created to address the needs of boomers who are entering into a new phase of life in their sixties.

Technology

Over the past fifty years, technology has been playing a larger part in all forms of learning and education. The advent of laptop computers, the Internet, Wi-Fi, tablets, smartphones and, most recently, smart watches has opened a whole new world of possibilities for teaching and learning. Online learning comes more naturally to the millennials who are digital natives, but more and more adults of all generations have gone online over the past ten years and have experienced varied forms of learning. YouTube, Google, and other platforms provide an almost limitless number of ways to learn something new. The possibilities of online learning allow any congregation to provide options for almost every adult in the congregation and her or his learning needs and learning style. Adult faith formation leaders are becoming curators, assembling a number of learning options that appear on a congregation's website.

There has been an ongoing conversation about the need for human interaction as part of adult faith formation. High touch or high tech? Some adult formation leaders prefer hybrid models of learning with some online learning and face-to-face meetings. Others appreciate the ability of the Internet to create a virtual community without the need to come together in a physical space. Each has its place in a congregation's faith formation network.

Intergenerational Learning

In the "Ecumenical Study of Lifelong Faith Formation," Joan Weber and the team found "Congregations are discovering that intergenerational faith formation—bringing all age groups together to learn about their faith—is an effective way to accomplish the goals of lifelong faith formation" (Weber, 6). Congregations have found that intergenerational faith formation provides an excellent form of adult faith formation. In the process, adults have an opportunity to learn with other adults and also to learn from and with other generations in the congregation. "It includes intentional opportunities for learners to 'cross' their generational boundaries and learn, pray, serve, and be in community with a variety of ages" (Martineau, 58). This cross-generational approach builds relationships throughout the congregation and over time creates a learning community where all forms of learning will flourish.

Conclusion

Adult faith formation has been moving more and more to the front in many congregations and churches. Today adult faith formation leaders promote a holistic approach to working with adults—addressing the head (inform), the heart (form), and the hands (transform). Any one of these centers may be the entry point for an adult learner, but eventually all three areas must be addressed. Service opportunities may provide an introduction to adult learning for young adults, but it needs to be connected to reflection on the gospel as a motivation for Christian service and a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is a real hunger among many people today for a deeper spirituality. Adult faith formation leaders need to attend to the spiritual development of adults. Neil Parent says, "the journey to mature Christian faith also involves substantial inner spiritual work" (67). He suggests that silence, detachment, humility, patience, and attentiveness are necessary for the learner to hear and see God who is the Great Teacher. Jane Regan proposes a "one-third rule" for adult formation events. One-third of the time should be given over to prayer and reflection, one-third to presentation of content, and one-third to conversation. While every session may not evenly reflect this distribution, an overall program should approximate this distribution (164).

Studies of congregations where adult faith formation flourishes have developed a "culture." It begins with a vision for the community that gives adult formation the highest priority and a leadership team, including the clergy, who buy into the vision and whose members are willing to work together to bring it to reality. Without communication and collaboration among the leadership team it is not possible to create a new culture.

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exploring |||||||||||||||||||||

|||||||||||| the seasons of adulthood

Young Adulthood

KYLE OLIVER

▌▌▌▌▌▌Chapter 3 explores young adulthood—adults in their twenties and thir-ties—single and married. Young adulthood encompasses the years of "emerging adulthood" (eighteen to twenty-nine) a time of significant change and transition, and the early years of marriage and the beginning of parenting. In American society today, the young adult stage of adulthood corresponds to the millennial generation. (As of 2015, the oldest millennials are thirty-five years old and the youngest in the later years of high school.)

This chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspec-tives on young adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Developmental Perspectives

Physiological and Cognitive Changes

Although young adulthood is not so dramatic a time of physiological and cognitive changes as the upheaval of adolescence, there are still significant issues to be mindful

of with this age group. As A. Rae Simpson of the MIT Young Adult Development Project puts it, eighteen and twenty-five-year-olds are very different from each other: "They do not look the same, feel the same, think the same, or act the same" (4). In particular, recent research has suggested that development continues until age twenty-five in the parts of the brain that regulate "complex cognitive tasks such as inhibition, executive functioning, and attention." These changes may be related to the "training" provided by the challenging life tasks that take place during this time (Lebel & Beaulieu, 10943).

Simpson names five categories of cognitive changes that take place in early young adulthood: 1) increasing complexity of thought, 2) growing acceptance of a variety of perspectives, 3) improving facility for reciprocity in relationships, 4) better handling of emotions, and 5) easier navigating of risk and decisions. Cognitive development in later young adulthood, according to Simpson, is less predictable and also subtler. She writes, "Employers, parents, peers, and others often sense this evolution subjectively, noticing that someone in or after their mid 20s is somehow more 'mature,' more fully an adult. Elements that are part of this growth include: new levels of abstract analysis . . . more complex problem-solving . . . enhanced leadership capacity . . . greater capacity for self-evaluation . . . [and] internal commitments in work and relationships" (9).

Notice the way these later skills build upon the previous. It is helpful to picture the early young adult brain and the early young adult self growing in tandem. Certain skills are unable to come to maturity until the proper wiring is in place and relatively stable. For example, if an early young adult is struggling mightily to regulate emotions and impulsivity, it's perhaps no wonder that strong feelings about work (both positive and negative) can interfere with the ability to evaluate one's fitness for it and imagine making a long-term commitment to it. As time passes, these transitional tasks of emerging adulthood become more manageable and more desirable.

Psycho-Social Development

More interesting and profound than the physiological and cognitive development taking place in young adulthood is psycho-social development—the changing relationships with social spheres of life. For developmental theorist Erik Erikson, young adulthood is the period of the psycho-social crisis between intimacy and isolation. After a "hazardously long human pre-adulthood" (70), and having reached full sexual maturity, the young adult is free to explore his or her widest-yet scope of social interactions—encompassing potential "partners in friendship, sex, competition, and cooperation" (31).

The decision to associate and share with others (or not) is complicated by the fact that these others now include "persons of very different backgrounds" (Erikson, 71). For those heading to college, the extent of the difference is determined in

part by the diversity of the school in terms of both geography and social class. For those who begin working, it is determined by coworkers and is likely to include significant generational diversity among peers for the first time.

In Erikson's framework, this is the period in which love emerges as a basic strength, overcoming in healthy individuals the pathology of exclusivity. The rituals of this stage of development involve both cooperative and competitive affiliation (32), the establishing "shared patterns of living" with friends, roommates, romantic partners, classmates, and coworkers (71). I'm reminded in my own life of the excitement and confusion associated with learning to move between groups—friends from the dorm, friends at church, friends in my engineering classes, friends from my job as a writing tutor. I began to recognize the traits and habits that formed solidarity in each of these groups and led to what Erikson calls "commitment to a *style of production*" (71, emphasis original), subculturally consistent ways of doing things.

At its best, the process taught me how to do the "work" of each group, by attending sporting events and parties, by worshipping on Sundays without a parent's nudging, by forming study groups to get through mountains of math and science "problem sets" (despite my preference for working alone), and by establishing rapid relationships of collegiality and trust with the tutees whose papers I commented on and discussed. Such training is crucial preparation for Erikson's next stage, in which generativity versus stagnation is the operative crisis in the world of "divided labor" and responsibility for a shared household (Erikson, 32).

Carol Gilligan's feminist critique of Erikson and other psychologists emphasizes in this transitional stage a gendered difference that grows as young adult development continues. The relationship between identity and intimacy tends to be very different for men and women. Describing a particular interview-based study, Gilligan writes,

> In response to the request to describe themselves, all of the women describe a relationship, depicting their identity *in* the connection of future mother, present wife, adopted child, or past lover. Similarly, the standard of moral judgment that informs their assessment of self is a standard of relationship, an ethic of nurturance, responsibility, and care. Measuring their strength in the activity of attachment . . . these highly successful and achieving women do not mention their academic and professional distinction. . . . If anything, they regard their professional activities as jeopardizing their own sense of themselves (159, emphasis original).

In a period of life focused on learning to compete *and* cooperate, to separate oneself *and* to form intimate associations, women and men tend to form different patterns and priorities. Gilligan points out that the "critical experience" for women in these years is "not intimacy but choice" (164), the ability to choose freely in the

inevitable conflicts between intimate care and regard on the one hand (an ethic that seeks to avoid hurting others) and integrity to one's personal needs and desires on the other (165–66). If North American society is to avoid further perpetuating unjust gender role expectations (especially within heterosexual couples), it is incumbent upon women to resist an unreflective deference to the cultural expectation of self-sacrifice and upon men to resist an unreflective expectation of the absolute right to compete and achieve without regard for others (166).

Jeffrey Arnett believes that in the twentieth century we saw a new stage of human development: *emerging adulthood*. It formed as young adults delayed marriage and responded to new economic realities. They are no longer youth but not quite adults. Emerging adulthood is marked by five important themes (8):

1. It is the age of *identity explorations*, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.

2. It is the age of *instability*.

3. It is the most *self-focused* age of life.

4. It is the age of *feeling in-between*, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.

5. It is the age of *possibilities*, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.

Donald Capps has spread out Erickson's sequence in ten-year stages. Thus, Erikson's "Life Cycle Completed" becomes Capps's "Decades of Life." In the latter's framework, the "younger-adult decades" are not characterized primarily by intimacy and love and then generativity and care, as in Erikson. Instead the twenties are the decade of the conflict between initiative and guilt (Capps names it "the purposeful self") and the thirties, the decade of industry versus inferiority ("the competent self").

Capps notes that the initiative versus guilt conflict is about becoming active and responsible, "both for beginning or originating something, and for being held personally accountable for what one has done" (46). This scheme certainly accords well with a decade in which an individual comes to the full maturity of legal status in every jurisdiction and sphere of life and, in most cases, begins living apart from his or her parents—although this pattern has been complicated for what is sometime called "the boomerang generation."

To stress the purposive energy of this decade is to note that the increase in agency, in the course of healthy development, is accompanied by a growing commitment to achieving particular goals (Capps, 49). So the twenties are a decade of aligning self-motivated action with the sense of one's own desired direction. It is like the process of "orienting the map" (rotating it so that north points north) before setting out along a prespecified direction. In theory, it is a one-time process

of first turning and then going. In practice, it is an iterative process of false starts and self-correction.

The thirties, then, are that time when the hiker starts to make steady and reliable progress toward a chosen goal. This is the decade of competence; one can rely on "the logic of tools and skills" (Erikson in Capps, 68) because "one is well-qualified to do the job that one is doing" (68). We are troubled less through the course of this development by a sense of inferiority and can instead go about the business and craft of productivity (66). Of course, individual results will vary, and industry and inferiority are said to be in conflict because at times our progress will still be tentative or halting.

Notice that Capps's framework is vulnerable to the same critiques as Erikson's from Gilligan. There's a strong preference in all of this language for the metaphors of the workplace rather than toward those of the household—of the objective and material world over against the interconnectivity of relationship. The sense of preparedness and competent functioning Capps ascribes to this decade is most likely felt more strongly by thirtysomethings in the working world than in the new struggle of parenting. Nevertheless, Capps's realigning of Erikson's early stages in the young adult decades seems both apt and helpful.

Family Life Cycle

Young adulthood is concerned with coming to terms with one's own parents (and siblings and grandparents—the family of origin) as well as finding a partner and perhaps beginning the journey of parenthood anew in the next generation.

According to family therapists McGoldrick and Shibusawa, young adults first face the challenge of differentiating themselves without repudiating or replacing their family of origin and its "emotional program": "This is the chance for them to sort out emotionally what they will take along from the family of origin, what they will leave behind, and what they will create for themselves" (385). This task gets further complicated when one considers the cognitive developments still underway and the increasing tendency for those who have moved out to at some point move back in with their parents (the rate of returning home has nearly doubled since the 1920s). Richard Fulmer has an especially helpful way of describing this first family task of young adulthood; he calls it "exporting relatedness" (215). The young adult confers "family" status on an expanding, but still small, number of persons *in addition* (one hopes) to the family of origin.

The next major family transition for most young adults is finding a partner. Fulmer notes that for many, the process of dating will at some point turn to "the search for a perfect love . . . whom they can value and be valued by so intensely that all ambivalence, uncertainty, self-doubts, sadness, and fears of the future are swept away forever" (217). This may be an overstatement, but it is nevertheless what many people often sound like. A newly married couple recently contrasted this "romantic comedy life" with their lived experience of a real marriage.

In our own experience of dating and marriage, my wife and I have found invaluable those honest conversations with other couples that have helped us make sense of this persistent tension. Against the backdrop of fondly remembered family stories (legends, really) and portrayals of relationships in popular culture, real conflict with a real partner often comes as a rude awakening. Besides the disappointments of all-too-imperfect loves, McGoldrick and Shibusawa add as an additional complicating factor the matter of all the additional relationships that come *with* the search for a partner. Joining a couple means entering an additional family system and beginning to form a third, "overlapping" one (387).

Lastly, there is the transition of becoming a parent. McGoldrick and Shibusawa note that the arrival of the first child makes the family system permanent; even if the couple separate, they will remain a family system with each other as parents of their child(ren) (387–88). The arrival of children strains even healthy and stable marriages and is marked by "a general decrease in marital satisfaction, a reversion to more traditional sex roles even by dual-career couples who previously had a more equitable relationship, and a lowering of self-esteem for women" (388). Carolyn and Philip Cowan point out that not all the changes that happen for parents are negative or draining. There are in this stage of life major catalysts to increased maturity, impulse control, generosity, interdependence, and conviction (432).

Life Issues and Transitions

At this stage, the major non-family-related life issue is the beginning of a life of work and of relationships outside of the family. Here again, a familiar gender distinction comes to the fore: "Whereas for women the problems at this stage more often focus on short-circuiting their definition of themselves in favor of finding and accommodating to a mate, men more often have difficulty committing themselves in relationships, forming instead an incomplete identity focused around work" (McGoldrick & Shibusawa, 386). Particularly troubling about these issues is the one that Carmen Knudson-Martin calls "the problem of choice."

She notes that while most heterosexual couples want to have an equitable relationship, they nevertheless tend to make decisions (usually attributed to "personal choice") that reinforce pervasive and unjust societal gender role expectations. So men continue to "get a pass" for working long hours, and women continue to face workplace discrimination and unfair expectations at home. And the whole messy situation is often covered over by the cloak of personal choice (334–35). Regardless of how one feels about her particular advice, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's publication of *Lean In* has done our society a tremendous favor in providing a locus of popular conversation about these issues. Knudson-Martin recommends regular and proactive discussion among partners who want to resist social gender norms.

Generational Perspectives

While there are no universally accepted birthdate cutoffs for millennials, Pew Research identifies millennials as those born after 1980 and before 2000. When asked what makes their generation unique, millennials named the following top five characteristics: 1) technology use, 2) music/pop culture, 3) liberal/tolerant, 4) smarter, and 5) clothes (Taylor, 34).

A View of Their Lives Today

For millennials in their twenties, life is a fascinating blend of mixed emotions—a fun and exciting time of life with a great deal of freedom *and* a stressful and uncertain time of life. When asked in the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults (Arnett & Schwab, 2012) how it feels to be an emerging adult, they responded in the following way:

- This time of life is fun and exciting (83 percent).
- This time of life is full of changes (83 percent).
- Overall, I am satisfied with my life (81 percent).
- At this time of my life, I feel I have a great deal of freedom (73 percent).
- This time of my life is stressful (72 percent).
- This time of my life is full of uncertainty (64 percent).
- I often feel anxious (56 percent).
- I often feel depressed (32 percent).
- I often feel that my life is not going well (30 percent).

Emerging adults are struggling with big identity questions about who they are and how they fit into the world. Their lives are in flux as they try to make their way toward building a foundation for adulthood. In the Clark University Poll, more than three-fourths (77 percent) of eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds agreed "This is the time of my life for finding out what I really am."

Relationship to Institutions and Authority

Millennials have developed a positive view of older generations. A full 94 percent of those Rainer and Rainer surveyed reported "great respect for older generations" (59). The pair speculates that one cause of this trend may be the increased involvement of older members of the extended family (59), which is related, in turn, to increasing life expectancy for those family elders.

But whatever the cause of millennials' respect for their elders, it does not extend to their parents and grandparents' institutions. The Pew Research Center reports that millennials are more detached from institutions than any other age cohort

(5). One apparent exception is the fairly high desire noted in Rainer and Rainer's research for "a stronger governmental role" in millennials' lives. The researchers present the theory that this apparently "reluctant" sentiment is tied to the economic turmoil that has accompanied their coming into adulthood and made them increasingly dependent on government help for necessities like health insurance (113–14).

Family Relationships

The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults found that even among those in their late twenties, more than half reported "daily contact" with parents. This is typical of a generational cohort that is highly connected in general and holds elders in high regard. It is also unsurprising behavior for the generation raised by highly involved parents. Rainer and Rainer found that 87 percent of millennials consider their parents a "positive source of influence" (56). It is important to note that not all of these parents are still (or ever were) a couple; only 62 percent of millennials report having grown up with both parents married, compared to 71 percent of Gen Xers, 85 percent of boomers, and 87 percent of silents ("Millennials," Pew Research [2010], 53). These numbers may be related to another trend: 52 percent of millennials say "being a good parent" is one of their highest life priorities, and 30 percent say having a successful marriage is (Pew Research [2010], 2).

Over the decade of the twenties, young adults gradually begin the process of moving out of their parents' household. Here is a snapshot of current living arrangements of young adults in their twenties from the Clark University Poll:

- living with parents (30 percent)
- living with a husband or wife (23 percent)
- living with friends or roommates (16 percent)
- living alone (14 percent)
- living with a boyfriend or girlfriend (13 percent)

Work and Life

According the Clark University Poll, 79 percent of young adults in their twenties agree that "it is more important to enjoy my job than to make a lot of money," and 86 percent agree that "it is important to me to have a career that does some good in the world." But, nearly two-thirds agree that they have not been able to find the kind of job they really want.

Karen K. Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani extrapolate from a number of studies that millennials put a high value on maintaining work/life balance, a preference that sometimes puts them at odds with work colleagues from previous generations (227–28). That result matches Thom Rainer's informal conversation with

the millennials at his company (125–26) and with the millennials study data. In fact, work/life balance was the only job-selection factor on Rainer and Rainer's survey that more than half of respondents marked as "extremely important" for them (131).

Technology Usage

Millennials have the highest usage of computers, cell phones, and social media among all of the generations. Almost 90 percent of young adults use computers somewhere in their lives—at work, school, home, or someplace else. Among young adults in their twenties and thirties, more than 97 percent have a cell phone, and almost 80 percent have smart phones. For those eighteen to twenty-nine, 97 percent use the Internet, email, or access the Internet via a mobile device; and 93 percent for those in their thirties ("The Web at 25 in the U.S.," Pew Research).

As of January 2015, 87 percent of young adults in their twenties were Facebook users, 37 percent Twitter users, 53 percent Instagram users, 34 percent Pinterest users, and 23 percent LinkedIn users. For young adults in their thirties, 73 percent were Facebook users, 25 percent Twitter users, 25 percent percent Instagram users, 28 percent Pinterest users, and 31 percent LinkedIn users ("Social Media Update 2014," Pew Research).

The typical digital native is engaged with media of some kind for about twelve hours a day: listening to music, watching television, using the Internet, and texting. Music listening and Internet usage are the most significant at 3.5 hours each. Texting takes up the least time, but in some ways it is the most important because it keeps them constantly connected to the people most important to them. When they divided their survey sample in half by age, Rainer and Rainer found that among younger millennials, text messaging is more popular than for older millennials and the telephone less so (191).

In 2010, the Pew Internet and American Life Project released a report of each generation's Internet activities. That research found that each of the following activities engaged at least 50 percent of American millennials: email, search, accessing health information, using social networking sites, watching video, getting news, buying products, instant messaging, listening to music, making travel reservations, reading online classified ads, banking, accessing government websites, and playing games (Zickuhr). While video game use varies widely among millennials, it can reach such high levels for some emerging adults because of the very nature of this life stage. No authority figures enforce time restrictions, and significant life commitments have not yet come along to force gaming out of the picture.

Psychologists and technology experts are divided about the effects of all this technology usage. A typical survey of experts in this area by Pew Research showed clearly the spectrum of opinion:

[Respondents] said many of the young people growing up hyperconnected to each other and the mobile Web, and counting on the Internet as their external brain, will be nimble, quick-acting multitaskers who will do well in key respects.

At the same time, these experts predicted that the impact of networked living on today's young will drive them to thirst for instant gratification, settle for quick choices, and lack patience (Anderson & Rainie).

Communication Style

Millennials' communication style is related to the digital devices that mediate connections for them. They are the "connected generation." Millennials want to be able to reach out to their networks and receive speedy and personal replies. Studies of millennials in business settings, for instance, find that they expect frequent, open, informal, supportive communication (Myers & Sadaghiani, 229).

Learning Style

Amy Novotney reports that scholars are uncertain about whether millennials as a group share common learning needs, styles, or preferences, with research on this question "just trickling in" (60). Novotney recommends those who teach millennials incorporate new media resources, create informal learning environments, stress the practical dimension of the material, and take advantage of pedagogical innovations like service learning and other active learning techniques (60). Stacy Williams Duncan of the Teaching Resource Center at the University of Virginia recommends that people worry less about learning styles per se and more about the kinds of learning environments best suited for millennials. Here again, the need to use multimedia resources and active learning techniques to supplement traditional "talking head" lecturing rose to the top of the list.

Worship Style

Thom Rainer claims the "old worship war paradigm" (contemporary versus traditional) no longer applies today, and that millennials are seeking at least three important features in worship experiences: 1) they desire music to have *rich* content—singing songs that reflect deep biblical and theological truths; 2) they desire *authenticity* in a worship service; and 3) they want a *quality* worship service that reflects preparation by the worship leaders.

Religious and Spiritual Perspectives

Faith Development

In his seminal *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler encourages readers to differentiate between *religion* as "cumulative traditions" and *faith* as "the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition" (9). Faith is where we explore the questions that matter most to us—the questions Douglas Adams famously labeled "life, the universe, and everything"—with the language and images our religious forebears have passed on to us. We always do that in community, and Fowler describes these communities as "triads": the self relates to others, but the self and the others are also always relating to one or more "shared center(s) of value and power" (17). So my family, my faith community, and more make their meaning together with me as we each explore, construct our understandings of, and respond to the transcendent force(s) we recognize through the Christian tradition.

Fowler builds on developmental theory to propose a set of stages of faith that are loosely bound to the developmental stages of Erikson and others. This is so because faith development is much less predictable and steady than psycho-social develop-ment. Fowler proposes six distinct stages of faith that develop after the undifferentiated faith of infancy. He also presents an idealized or optimal time frame for the progression, in which Erikson's psycho-social stages and Fowler's faith stages line up in mutually supportive ways:

1. intuitive-projective faith (early childhood)

2. mythic-literal faith (school years and older)

3. synthetic-conventional faith (adolescence and adults)

4. individuative-reflective faith (young adults and adults)

5. conjunctive faith (midlife adults and older)

6. universalizing faith

Two stages are particularly important for understanding young adulthood.

Synthetic-conventional faith is the typical faith of adolescents, but it is also describes adults with great frequency (161). This faith is made possible by a growing self-awareness and capacity for mutual interrelation (152–53). At this stage "God . . . must also be reimagined as having inexhaustible depths of self and as being capable of knowing personally those mysterious depths of self and others" (153). Synthetic-conventional faith seeks God's acceptance and God's "backing" of the adolescent's or adult's developing personal myth, a myth that helps the adherent synthesize his or her "tacitly held" values, beliefs, ideologies, etc. (173). It is important to realize

that in this stage authority is external (154), and many stage three adults are all-too-happy to defer to conventional religious principles and authorities.

Individuative-reflective faith sees a person's "tacit values and meaning system" replaced by an "explicit system," usually because the individual has stepped out of his or her system of origin (neighborhood, ethnic group, social class, family political perspective, etc.) and gained a wider perspective on the world (177). For this transition to be genuine, young adults need not simply replace their old ideological system with a new one but to *choose* from a place of freedom. Authority must be relocated "within the self" (178–79). In this stage of faith, the connection between religious symbols and their meaning often becomes broken, no longer naively accepted. However, Fowler also points out that this breaking can be a breaking *open*; the individuative-reflective faith is open to exploring and expressing the personal meaning of symbols and rituals (181). Some who grow into stage four do so at the "optimal" time, during Erikson's intimacy versus isolation crisis. Others, Fowler says, make the transition in their thirties or forties, when it can be "precipitated by changes in primary relationship . . . moving [or] changing jobs, or the experience of the breakdown or inadequacy of one's synthetic-conventional faith" (181).

Since the publication of *Stages of Faith* in the 1970s, there has been a significant decrease in the religious participation of youth and young adults. Although Fowler would be quick to remind us of the distinction between religion and faith—that ultimate meanings and our commitments in relation to them develop as much outside a congregation as within one—it is fair to speculate that this trend has been accompanied by a decrease in faith reflection, mentoring, and nurture—and hence also development. Many young adults have little or no access to more spiritually mature faith mentors whose role would be to help them explore their synthetic-conventional faith. Congregations have the responsibility and the privilege of providing opportunities for young adults to explore the richness of the Christian tradition and to discover, in their own time, the joys of claiming an individuative-reflective faith for themselves. Wise mentors may need to master the art of facilitating such conversation *outside* of traditional church settings.

Religiosity and Faith Practices

The Pew Research Center has found that millennials are more religiously unaffiliated than their parents or grandparents were at the same age. In 2012, Pew Research found that 34 percent of young adults born from 1990–94 were unaffiliated from organized religion, and 30 percent of those born from 1981–89 ("'Nones' on the Rise," Pew Research).

Christian Smith and Patricia Snell's *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* presents the National Study on Youth and Religion findings on emerging adults (eighteen to twenty-three). This is the same group of

people who were studied during adolescence. So how has this cohort changed since they were thirteen to seventeen-year-olds?

- There was an 11 percent decrease in the number reporting religious service attendance once per week or more and an 18 percent increase in the number reporting no attendance. About one-third of those surveyed attend services regularly; more than half do not attend (Smith & Snell, 112).
- There was a 9 percent decrease in the number claiming high importance of "religious faith shaping daily life" (including a 16 percent decrease among mainline Protestants but only an 8 percent decrease among Roman Catholics and a miniscule 1 percent decrease among black Protestants). Less than half of these emerging adults place a high importance on faith in daily life, and less than a third are very interested in learning about religion (Smith & Snell, 114).
- There was a 7 percent decrease in belief in God (including a 17 percent decrease in mainline Protestants but a 6 percent decrease for Roman Catholics and no change for black Protestants). Most still believe in God (78 percent), but few (29 percent) feel particularly close to God (Smith & Snell, 119).
- There were decreases in religious practices, including daily prayer, daily Bible reading, Sabbath rest, sharing faith with others, and participating in religious education. The only area of increase was in the practice of "religious or spiritual meditation not including prayer," which saw a 5 percent increase with the cohort as a whole and a 14 percent increasing among mainline Protestants (Smith & Snell, 116).
- There was a high degree of respect for organized religion (79 percent), but a low need to be part of a religious congregation "in order to be truly religious and spiritual" (25 percent).

David Gortner in *Varieties of Personal Theology: Charting the Beliefs and Values of American Young Adults* found that social capital and education levels were far more significant factors than religious background in shaping the theological beliefs of young adults. In fact, "religion tends to reinforce dominant cultural patterns in personal theologies, but otherwise is minimally influential in producing meaningful variations from dominant cultural patterns" (313). In other words, says Gortner, an upbringing in a faith community doesn't seem to have mattered much for most of today's young adults when it comes to their beliefs about God and the world.

On the other hand, this research found that "many young adults engage in [the] work of theological re-evaluation and reinvention—regardless of their affiliation or involvement with actual religious institutions" (328). This is basically what Fowler told us thirty years ago when he observed young adults synthesizing tacit beliefs (synthetic-conventional faith) and revising implicit beliefs in light of stepping out of their social system of origin (individuative-reflective faith) (173, 177).

Robert Wuthnow gives us still another way of speaking about the faith work of this time of life transition:

> The single word that best describes young adults' approach to religion and spirituality—indeed life—is *tinkering*. A tinkerer puts together a life from whatever skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand. In a culture like ours, where higher education and professional training are valued, tinkering may have negative connotations. But it should not. Tinkerers are the most resourceful people in any era. . . . They get things done, and usually this happens by improvising, by piecing together an idea from here, a skill from here, and a contact from somewhere else (13–14, emphasis original).

When Christian Smith and Patricia Snell notice lots of "religious tradition switching" (110) and "syncretistic spiritual practices" (137) among young adults, I believe they're encountering characteristic behaviors of Wuthnow's "Generation of Tinkerers." Moreover, Wuthnow believes their often-individualistic approach to faith is the natural result of the lack of support religious institutions have offered them in their developmental transitions, especially compared to the relative invest-ment in youth support (12). Gortner too calls for a reconsideration of and reinvest-ment in the role of ministers in helping young adults "forge lives of meaning and purpose" (329).

David Kinnaman in *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* describes three categories of church dropouts—nomads, prodi-gals, and exiles—that surfaced in Barna research studies. Nomads are wandering from church and wrestling with faith; prodigals are rejecting Christianity or leav-ing for another faith; and exiles have come to the conclusion that the church as we know it is the last thing their relationship with Jesus needs, and that they can be more faithful by exiling themselves from "cultural Christianity" to seek a deeper, authentic faith in Christ (69, 69, 83). Kinnaman's categories are grounded in the biblical and Christian tradition. His discussion of exiles, for example, is inspired by the prophetic tradition of Daniel and Ezekiel, Jews who were forced to live in Babylon but nevertheless "blessed and renewed the people of God" (88): "[Exiles] sense that the established church has internalized many of 'Babylon's' values of consumerism, hyperindividualism, and moral compromise instead of living in-but-not-of as kingdom exiles. As a consequence many of today's exiles . . . feel isolated and alienated from the Christian community—caught between the church as it is and what they believe it is called to be" (77).

So there's a sense in which exile is the problem—these young adults have left the church, after all!—and a sense in which exile is the solution—for they have left largely for good and faithful reasons. The exiles certainly have not abandoned the God whom they trust is still with them and indeed is still active in the place of their exile—call it Babylon, or twenty-first-century America, or the world, or whatever.

We can capture something of Kinnaman's nomads and exiles, and something of the special developmental situation of young adulthood, if we imagine young adults, all of them, as *pilgrims*. Though it is true that all of life, and especially the life of faith, is a journey, young adulthood is a journey of meaning and adventure in a particularly intensive way. Leaving home, launching a career, starting a family—these are foreign lands indeed. Remembering this may guide us as we minister to these pilgrim travelers. "What are you seeking, pilgrim? What is your quest?" If young adulthood is to be a time of dynamic faith formation, these are the questions we need to ask over and over again. But a pilgrimage is just a trip if meaning is not connected to the journey. There is some risk that young adults are not asking big life questions during this time in life. There is a much greater risk that they are asking them without any consideration that the Christian church, or even God, might have anything to do with them.

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Midlife Adulthood

JIM MERHAUT

▌▌▌▌▌▌Chapter 4 explores midlife adulthood—adults in their forties and fifties. Midlife adulthood is a complex time that is marked both by stability and mastery of life, and by chaos and uncertainty. Midlife adults are in the midst of their most productive professional years. Many are engaged in the joys and demands of family life and tending to the needs of their children. But they are also at a crossroads. They have lived about half as long as they will live, and this realization can have a profound impact on midlife adults.

This chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspectives on young adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Developmental Perspectives

Life is firming up for adults in their forties. Career trajectories are solidifying for both married couples and singles. Family life is well established for those who are married. In order to provide stability for their school-age children, midlife adults work

hard to put down roots in a particular community. As adults move through this stage of life, they often reevaluate priorities and begin to shift some of their commitments to bring more stability to the relationships that they want to sustain as permanent. They may reinvest in a marriage or they might reconnect with distant family members. They may work harder at making quality and quantity time for friends. A strong sense of stability and permanence expressed in clearer commitments characterizes life for many.

Key Issues

While adults are more like apprentices in earlier life stages, midlife adulthood is characterized by mastery of skills. As adults move through midlife, they take on higher levels of responsibility both in their workplaces and in the civic community. They are often the middle managers in the workforce if not business owners or CEOs. They might be the teachers who are moving into educational administration or becoming department heads. They are professionals who begin to publish within their fields. They are employees who become supervisors. They begin to take on mentoring roles because of their higher levels of experience and expertise.

Middle adults, especially those in their fifties, also struggle with what has been called the midlife crisis. It's a significant moment in life, often triggered by a decline in physical functionality, when a person becomes consciously aware that life is half spent. A person at midlife begins to sense that death is a reality that must be acknowledged and life needs to be lived with greater purpose and less certainty. Even in the midst of the stability of many commitments, they begin to ponder the ambiguity of life. Things are not as clear as they used to seem. Right and wrong are not as easy to identify. The gray areas take on greater significance. One begins to consider that perhaps the perspectives of others are as reasonable as one's own. Middle adults seek to balance things that seemed like polar opposites and mutually exclusive realities earlier in life. A sign that one is maturing in healthy ways in midlife is the observation that one moves away from an us-against-them mentality and more towards a we're-all-in-this-together mentality. This midlife experience of reconciling opposites is captured by the faith development concept of *conjunctive faith*, which is described by James Fowler and Carl Jung (Fowler, 51–54). It is a time that is ripe for in-depth learning and true soul searching that can leader to a deeper sense of human community.

Identity

It is helpful to recall the identity crisis that adolescents and young adults experience in order to capture a key characteristic of middle adults. "Who am I?" is a critically important question that adolescents and young adults seek to answer. Erik Erikson placed the quest for identity in the second decade of life. The quest for a

self-identity drives younger adults to a particular college, genre of music, career, and relationships. There is little doubt about Erikson's assertion that adolescence comprises a deep search for the self, but learning who we are and to whom we are faithful is a quest that continues beyond adolescence, and Donald Capps asserts that the search for identity returns in a new way during midlife.

Midlife adults continue to seek a definition for self, but the question becomes "Who am I with you?" Relationships take on deeper meaning and compel them to explore how the self is adjusted in the context of committed family, work, and civic relationships that have become so important at this stage of life. One is a parent, a colleague, a leader, a team member, and more. Young adults play many of these roles as well, but they are more preoccupied with learning how to function in these roles while adults in their forties and fifties have largely mastered them and are looking for the deeper relational connections within the roles.

Midlife adults also shift their gaze towards those who will come after them. They are experiencing what Erikson called *generativity*, moving beyond their self-centered younger years and discovering a new self that is centered on others, on those who will come after them. Generativity, expressing care for the generations that follow, offers the satisfying promise of leaving a legacy, a promise that will continue to grow and mature into mature adulthood. Many midlife adults dive into mentoring roles with great success.

Life Goals

In midlife, adults take stock of where they've come from, reflecting on their family of origin and the meaning of their formative adolescent years. They wonder how earlier life events and relationships contribute to their present life commitments. "Am I becoming my mother/father?" is a common query of middle adults. What should be retained from the formative years and what should be left behind? What will be one's unique contribution moving forward in life? They wonder, for example, about which parts of their parenting style should be similar to their own parents and which parts need to be reinvented.

At the same time, midlife draws one closer to life's personal destiny. One's ultimate future comes into sharper focus. Midlife adults anchor themselves in a particular way of life filled with stable commitments, and the firmness of the ground upon which they stand provides sure footing for next steps. Considerations of second careers, travel and exploration, and the possibilities associated with the empty nest begin to open up. Donald Capps puts it this way:

> (The fifth decade) is the decade when one undergoes a profound 'identity crisis.' . . . After all, one has lived long enough to have some rather distinct impression of who one is and has become, and these very impressions are likely to produce uncertainty as to how one feels about oneself, especially

with regard to one's character (moral strength, self-discipline, fortitude, and so forth); life goals (how effective one has been in pursuing them, whether they should be altered or revised, whether they reflect the core of one's being, and so forth); and origins (how they have fostered or impeded one's development into the kind of person one aspires to be, whether they afford previously untapped resources that one may use more effectively in the second half of one's life, and so forth).

One stands, as it were, on the bridge between the young and the old, and the road one has traveled and the road ahead are of roughly equal distance. It makes sense, then, that one would stop for a moment and engage in self-reflection (Capps, 89).

The life goals that were established a decade or two ago are reevaluated in midlife. "Am I in the right career? I'm well established, so is it worth the risk to try something new?" Looking to the future causes middle adults to open up to new goals. What one thought was so important years ago doesn't seem so important now. The causes for which one stood up and fought in earlier years still matter, but the relationships associated with those causes start to matter more. Goals shift away from accomplishments and turn to the personal connections that will ripen in the later years of life.

The self in the midlife years shares common themes with the self in the adolescent years but with greater relational awareness and intentionality. This self-reflective disposition sets the stage for deeper relational experiences.

Relationships

The developmental theme for interpersonal relationships is different in midlife from that in young adulthood. The young adult is developing the capacity for intimacy, especially with friends and loves, colleagues, and for many, a spouse/partner. The midlife adult is focused on maintaining intimate relationships with people of the same age group—that is, with a spouse/partner, with friends, and with colleagues. The midlife adult is also developing the capacity for new kinds of relationships with those younger and older. That is, the adult in midlife is involved with the generative task of caring and guiding the next generations (including children and grandchildren) and with caring for the older generation (Davis, 258).

Community

Midlife adults are engaged in the life of their communities. They are typically raising children and teens and are drawn into a whole host of community organizations and school activities because of their children. They nurture friendships with parents of other children that often last for the rest of their lives. And whether or

not they are married, they possess a developing appreciation for ideas and values that are different from their own. They want to explore diversity within communities of dialogue. They are looking for ways to be engaged and for ways to contribute to civic society, schools, churches, and other organizations driven by a desire to leave the world better than they found it. They have a growing urge to build a legacy, and they want to work with others to develop and distribute their gifts to the next generation.

Family Life Cycle

There are multiple stages of the family life cycle for adults in their forties and fifties. During this time parents and families will be transitioning from the years of childhood into the adolescent years of middle school and high school. Parents will have made the big shift of moving up a generation and becoming caretakers to the younger generation. Adolescence ushers in a new era because it marks a new definition of the children within the family and of the parents' role in relation to their children.

Families with adolescents must establish different boundaries than families with younger children, a job made more difficult in our times by the lack of built-in rituals to facilitate this transition. The boundaries must now be permeable. Parents can no longer maintain complete authority. Adolescents can and do open the family to a whole array of new values as they bring friends and new ideals into the family arena. Parents are challenged by the twin tasks of allowing for the increasing independence of the new generation, while maintaining appropriate boundaries and structure to foster continued family development.

As we have already seen, the central event in the marital relationship at this phase is usually the midlife crisis of one or both spouses, with an exploration of personal, career, and marital satisfactions and dissatisfactions. For adults in their forties and fifties there is usually a renegotiation of the marriage, which for some can lead to a decision to divorce.

As parents move into the later forties and fifties, a new stage of the family cycle unfolds—launching children into the post-high school world of college or other training, the military, and/or work, and into their own living situations. Until about a generation ago, most families were occupied with raising their children for their entire active adult lives until old age. Now, because of the low birth rate and the long life span of most adults, parents launch their children almost twenty years before retirement. The most significant aspect of this phase is marked by the great number of exits and entries of family members. It begins with the launching of grown children and proceeds with the entry of their spouses and children. It is a time when the parents of midlife adults are aging and may need care. Midlife adults not only must deal with the change in their own status as they make room for the next generation and prepare to move up to grandparental positions, but also with a

different type of relationship with their own parents, who may become dependent, giving them considerable caretaking responsibilities. This phase of life often necessitates a restructuring of the marital relationship now that parenting responsibilities are no longer required (McGoldrick & Shibusawa).

The Sandwich Generation

A new phenomena for midlife adults in their forties and fifties is the twin tasks caring for the younger generation and caring for the older generation. Kim Parker and Eileen Patten describe the "sandwich generation" report in a 2013 Pew Research report.

> With an aging population and a generation of young adults struggling to achieve financial independence, the burdens of and responsibilities of middle-aged Americans are increasing. Nearly half (47%) of adults in their 40s and 50s have a parent age sixty-five or older and either raising a young child or financially supported a grown child (age 18 or older). And about one-in-seven middle-aged adults (15%) is providing financial support to both an aging parent and a child.
>
> Adults who are part of the sandwich generation—that is, those who have a living parent age sixty-five or older and are either raising a child under age 18 or supporting a grown child—are pulled in many directions. Not only do many provide care and financial support to the parents and their children, but nearly four in ten (38%) say both their children and their parents rely on them for emotional support.

Life in the sandwich generation presents challenges—caregiving and financial and emotional support—and stresses—time constraints, financial well-being—that are not faced by other adults. Yet, according to Pew Research—these adults are just as happy with their lives overall as are other adults.

Generational Perspectives

Generation X comprises eighty-four million US adults born between 1961 and 1980—and who are in or moving into midlife adulthood. When asked what makes their generation unique, Gen Xers named the following top five characteristics: 1) technology use, 2) work ethic, 3) conservative/traditional, 4) smarter, and 5) respectful (Taylor, 34).

Portrayals of Generation X have tended to revolve around their individualism, independence, proficiency with technology, and high levels of education. They are arguably better educated than any generation before them. Half of Gen Xers grew

up in homes where both parents worked, and almost two in ten grew up in single-parents households. Perhaps this "latch-key kids" phenomenon coupled with their experience as the first generation to grow up with computers spawned Gen Xers fierce self-reliance, resilience, resourcefulness, desire for freedom, techie tendencies, and focus on entertainment. Gen Xers are independent thinkers and values oriented, and they appreciate people and organizations that are "being real." They are a digitally savvy group.

Reflecting on a national University of Michigan study of four thousand Gen Xers, Jon D. Miller reports that Generation X adults *today* are active in their communities, mainly satisfied with their jobs, and able to balance work, family, and leisure.

Employment and Education

Of Generation X adults, 86 percent work part time or full time; 70 percent spend forty or more hours working and commuting each week; and 40 percent spend fifty more hours each week working and commuting. Two-thirds of Generation X adults are satisfied with their current job.

Half of all Generation X have completed a post-secondary degree and 43 percent have earned a baccalaureate ("Active, Balanced, and Happy," Miller). Generation X adults have earned graduate and professional degrees at a higher rate than any previous generation and continue to do so—22 percent have completed at least one advanced degree and 10 percent have completed a doctorate or professional degree. Today, 11 percent of Generation X adults are enrolled in formal courses or schooling—almost four million adults (Miller, "Lifelong Learning").

Marriage and Families

Generation X adults are married, have children, and engage in a wide variety of family activities. Two-thirds of Generation X are currently married, and 71 percent report having children at home. Gen Xers place very high importance on family objectives: 83 percent said that "finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life" is very important to them; and 66 percent said that "having children" was very important to them ("Active, Balanced, and Happy," Miller). Having spent their formative years in the era of growing divorce rates (divorce peaked in 1980 and has been declining since 1996) and slowing birth rates, Gen X was expected to run away from marriage en masse. That has not happened.

Generation X parents report a high level of involvement with their children and high expectations for their future. By large majorities they expect their children/teens to graduate from college; they help their children/teens with homework; they talk to their children/teens about school weekly and attend school events

monthly; and they take their children to museums, science centers, and libraries. For example, 72 percent of the parents of pre-school children reported that they read to their child three or more hours each week (Miller, "Active, Balanced, and Happy").

Generation X parents have high academic expectations for their children and also a high level of involvement in education. There is a broad recognition of the value and importance of education and a parallel willingness to invest time and resources to enrich and enhance the education of their children (Miller, "Active, Balanced, and Happy").

Relationships and Community

Also called the "Friends Generation," Gen Xers are highly connected. They have extensive social, occupational, and community networks outside their immediate family: 66 percent entertain friends at least once a month, 95 percent talk on the phone with friends and family at least once a week (29 percent say at least once a day), and 33 percent are active members of a church or religious group (Miller, "Active, Balanced, and Happy").

Generation X adults have constructed extensive personal networks for themselves and their families. They have continued to build and use traditional networks around their families, coworkers, churches, and other organizations. But they have supplemented those traditional networks with digital social networks that allow more frequent conversations with parents, siblings, and children as they grow older. Even as digitally mediated networks and social media grow, Gen X adults demonstrate a healthy balance in their personal and social networks ("Social Capital," Miller).

Generation X adults have the highest volunteer rate of any age group. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (serve.gov), 29.2 percent of Generation Xers volunteer in comparison to 28.8 percent of boomers and 21.2 percent of millennials. In its 2012 report, the volunteer rate of Generation Xers showed a continued upward trend. Xers have increased their volunteerism rates by 5.5 percentage points over the past eleven years.

Technology Usage

Generation X adults have grown up in the Internet era. Many had computers at home or in school during their high school years. By the time they reached their twenties, the Internet was becoming a part of modern life. Almost 100 percent of all Generation X adults report that they regularly use the Internet.

Generation X adults have the second highest usage of computers, cell phones, and social media among all of the generations (after millennials). Over 80 percent use computers somewhere in their lives—at work, school, home, or someplace else. Among adults in their forties, 97 percent have a cell phone; and 88 percent for

those in their fifties. For those in their forties, 74 percent have smart phones; and over 60 percent for those in their fifties. For those in their forties, 93 percent use the Internet, email, or access the Internet via a mobile device; and 88 percent for those in their fifties ("The Web at 25 in the U.S.," Pew Research).

As of January 2015, 73 percent of adults in their forties and 60 percent of those in their fifties were Facebook users; 25 percent in their forties and 12 percent in their fifties were Twitter users; 25 percent in their forties and 11 percent in their fifties were Instagram users; 28 percent in their forties and 27 percent in their fifties were Pinterest users; and 31 percent in their forties and 30 percent in their fifties were LinkedIn users ("Social Media Update 2014," Pew Research).

Spiritual and Religious Perspectives

Faith Development

Adult faith development can span several of James Fowler's stages of faith. The faith of some midlife adults can be characterized as *synthetic-conventional*—a personal and largely unreflective synthesis of beliefs and values that supports one's identity and unites a person in emotional solidarity with others. The authority and support for faith rests in the whole community of faith. Fowler notes that is a very important stage of faith, one that can continue well into adulthood and throughout a person's life.

As discussed in chapter 3 an *individuative-reflective* faith can begin in young adulthood. People begin to critically reflect on the beliefs and values formed in previous stages. In this stage, people begin to rely upon third person "perspective taking"—a perspective that is neither just that of the self or reliant upon others, but is somehow above them both. The third-person perspective brings objectivity and enables people to understand the self and others as part of a social system. It is the beginning of the internalization of authority for one's faith. This stage brings a new quality of responsibility for the self and for one's choices. It marks the assumption of the responsibility for making explicit choices about faith and lifestyle. These open the way for more critically self-aware commitments in relationships and in vocation.

At midlife or beyond we may see the emergence of *conjunctive* faith. This stage involves the embrace and integration of opposites, or polarities, in one's life. It means realizing, in midlife, that one is both young and old, that youngness and oldness are held together in the same life. It means recognizing that we are both masculine and feminine, with all of the meanings those characterizations have. It means coming to terms with the fact that we are both constructive people and, inadvertently, destructive people. The apostle Paul captured this in Romans 7:19, 24: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

In the conjunctive stage, symbol and story, metaphor and myth, both from our own traditions and from others, seem to be newly appreciated. Having looked critically at traditions and translated their meanings into conceptual understandings, one experiences a hunger for a deeper relationship to the reality that symbols mediate. In that deeper relationship, we learn again to let symbols have the initiative with us. It is immensely important to let biblical narrative draw people into it and let it read their lives, reforming and reshaping, rather than their own reading and then forming their own meanings of the text.

Felicity Kelcourse summarizes the uniqueness of midlife faith when she writes,

> The faith of midlife resides in a growing ability to look beyond the pressures of the present moment toward an appreciation of the deeper meanings symbolized in religious tradition. Time for refreshment and reflection supports the active expression of generativity and care. Persons at this stage of life are, ideally, prepared to answer the questions posed by Fowler:
>
> • What are you spending and being spent for?
> • What commands and receives your best time, your best energy?
> • What causes, dreams, goals, or institutions are you pouring out your life for?
> • To what or whom are you committed in life? In death?
> • What are your most sacred hopes, those most compelling goals and purposes in your life? (85).

Midlife and Spirituality

The midlife years are particularly pregnant with spiritual transformation possibilities due to the "crossroads" nature of midlife. How does one synthesize what has been and shift gears to move forward with renewed purpose into what has yet to come? In *The Transcendent Self,* Adrian van Kaam describes spirituality of midlife adults and proposes key practices that make the middle years fertile for spiritual growth. Van Kaam sees the midlife crisis as much more than a psychological phenomenon:

> The midlife crisis is ultimately a spiritual one that challenges us to transcend a mainly vitalistic or functional appraisal of life. Its solution involves more than a psychological compromise or a program of physical exercise. New hobbies and entertainments can be part of the solution, but they are not the whole story. . . . Even those not much given to reflection on the meaning of their lives are forced now to search for a deeper reason to go on. That reason is found in a region of our personality where many of us do not feel much at home, for we must turn inwardly to the transcendent dimension of our spiritual life (12).

The intensity of the midlife crisis as a spiritual crisis is often determined by how deliberately one engaged in spiritual reflection at other key moments in life. For example, if one had parents and other significant adults assist with navigating the spiritual transition from adolescence to young adulthood, one might not experience the intensity of the midlife crisis because adults are familiar with the transformative experience. This can reduce anxiety and increase openness to the possibilities of hopeful growth during the transition from youthfulness to the later years. But if spiritual transformation was suppressed during earlier life transitions, then there is a strong likelihood that the midlife crisis will loom large and throw one significantly off balance.

The first key to spiritually mastering the midlife transition is to detach somewhat from identifying one's value with one's accomplishments. Our functionality is important and makes great contributions to our families and to our communities, but we are not defined entirely by what we can do at a particular phase of life. As midlife adults become aware through aging that they will be able to do less of what they used to do, they are invited and challenged by inner promptings to detach from the external accomplishments of the past and refocus on deeper life opportunities that are more relational.

The second key to spiritual transformation at midlife involves thoughtful reflection on what is really happening as one moves away from the vitality of the younger years. Recollection and prayer, particularly meditative prayer, are key practices to help one detach and refocus at midlife. Recollection allows one to acknowledge that a change is in fact happening and that the change is not a deadly threat, but rather a promise for greater spiritual abundance. Prayerful meditation allows God's power to guide the transformation. In prayer, one at midlife presents the crisis to God and, guided by the Scriptures, seeks to bind this important life transition with the paschal themes in Judaism and Christianity.

As one moves through midlife spiritually, one finds a new sense of unity with others and with the world as a whole. Deeper engagement in a community of spiritual practice is a third key to navigating the crisis at midlife. The appreciation for diversity and the rejection of black-and-white solutions to problems, so characteristic of people at midlife, are signs of a deeper spiritual urge to move one toward an all-encompassing embrace of God's creation. The whole of creation begins to feel like home rather than the limited areas of life where one has deep familiarity and high functionality. The spiritual movement of midlife is one of community participation with a deeper level of interpersonal intimacy.

Religiosity and Faith Practices

In 2012, Pew Research found that 21 percent of adults born between 1965–1980 were unaffiliated from organized religion ("'Nones' on the Rise," Pew Research). A large percentage of Generation X was raised with no religious affiliation—the result of their parents disengaging from organized religion and raising children in

a non-religious home. Overall, Generation X has become more secular and less Christian as it ages (a decline of 10 percent since 1990).

However, Generation Xers who *were* raised with a religious affiliation are considerably less likely than their parents' generation to separate from religion. Researcher Philip Schwadel says that one reason for this is that the religious scene today is more dynamic and textured than it was when baby boomers were coming of age in the 1960s and '70s. This has given Gen Xers more religious choices—a religious marketplace—that they can explore and engage with. If they aren't happy with a particular religion, they can more easily find a substitute instead of leaving entirely.

One in three Generation X adults is an active member of a church or religious organization, and almost all of these adults report attending one or more church or religious activities or events each week (Miller, "Active, Balanced, and Happy").

In *Gen X Religion*, Richard Flory identifies five major characteristics of Generation X religion that integrate many of the insights presented in this chapter about Generation X and midlife adults.

1. Generation X religion emphasizes the sensual and experiential, combining the sacred and the profane and incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs.

2. Generation X religion is entrepreneurial in finding cultural and institutional space to create new religious expressions based on their existing lifestyle interests.

3. Generation X religion is, on the one hand, similar to baby boomer religion in that it emphasizes personal identity, religious experience, and spiritual seeking; but it differs in that it roots the quest for religious identity in community, rather than a more purely personal spiritual quest.

4. Race, ethnic, and gender diversity and inclusiveness is an explicit goal of Generation X religion.

5. There is an insistence on an "authentic" religious experience in Generation X religion, both on the part of the individual and as found in the religious communities that Gen Xers choose to join, which acknowledges the ambiguities, trials, and successes of life (234–35).

Conclusion

The confirming and chaotic midlife years are a unique time of growth or decline. The increased levels of confidence due to significant life accomplishments can be both a blessing and a curse. Midlife adults powerfully transform societies with their contributions in every field while they explore for the first time the meaning of

declining physical vitality. Many enjoy the wonder of deeper interpersonal rela-
tionships while others try to escape feelings of isolation. Midlife holds within it the
promise of wisdom and those who navigate midlife with intentionality and within
a caring community can hope to know blessings in new and personal ways.

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Mature Adulthood

JANET SCHAEFFLER

Chapter 5 explores mature adulthood—adults in their later fifties through early seventies. This is a new stage of adulthood between midlife adults and older adults brought about by a longer life span as people live into the eighties and nineties and by the aging of the baby boom generation. In the United States today, Americans over sixty-five now outnumber teenagers by nearly two to one. We are in the midst of a changing perspective on adults as baby boomers reach what was traditionally viewed as a time to enjoy the golden years. We are witnessing the emergence of a new stage of life between adult midlife—typically focused on career and child rearing—and old age, traditionally marked by increasing frailty and decline. This new stage of life spans several decades and is characterized by generally good health, relative financial stability, and an active, engaged lifestyle.

Phyllis Moen, in her article "Midcourse: Navigating Retirement and a New Life Stage" writes, "[This is] the period in which individuals begin to think about, plan for, and actually disengage from their primary career occupations and the raising of children; develop new identities and new ways to be productively engaged; establish

new patterns of relating to spouses, children, siblings, parents, friends; leave some existing relationships and begin new ones. As in adolescence, people in the mid-course years are thinking about and enacting role shifts that are both products of their past and precursors of their future life course."

This chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual perspectives on mature adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Developmental Perspectives

Physiological and Cognitive Changes

Mature adulthood is the time when most people first become aware of the gradual changes in their bodies that mark the aging process. Even though there are many jokes about these changes, they have implications. They "have a significant impact on intrapsychic life (our thoughts, feelings, and emotions), on interpersonal life (our relationships), and on spiritual life (our faith, values, and ways of making meaning)" (Davis, 252).

At the same time, this age group does not see themselves as old. "Don't tell boomers that old age starts at sixty-five. The typical boomer believes that old age doesn't begin until age seventy-two. . . . About half of all American adults say they feel younger than their actual age, but fully 61 percent of boomers say this. In fact, the typical boomer feels nine years younger than his or her chronological age" (Cohn & Taylor).

For the physical changes in this age group, Western society often applies a double standard to men and women in terms of appearance. Older women tend to be viewed in unflattering terms. Aging men are more frequently perceived as displaying a maturity that enhances their status.

The physical changes are both external and internal. External changes include the appearance of grey and/or thinning hair, increases in facial wrinkles, and a tendency to put on weight around the waist or lower body. Height reaches a maximum during the twenties for most people and remains stable until about age fifty-five. After age fifty-five, bones become less dense and ultimately women lose two inches and men lose one inch in height. Women are more prone to declining height due to osteoporosis, a condition in which the bones become brittle, fragile, and thin due to a lack of calcium in the body. Throughout middle adulthood, strength gradually decreases, especially in the back and leg muscles. By age sixty, people have lost about 10 percent of their maximum strength.

Internal changes include reductions in the efficiency of the cardiovascular, respiratory, and nervous systems. Changes can be noticed, too, in sensory capacities. One of the most noticeable is the onset of presbyopia, a condition of farsightedness

due to progressive changes in the shape of the lens of the eye. This can lead to difficulty in reading small print. How often have you heard people say that their arms aren't long enough anymore (to hold the book further away)?

A learner in one of my classes summed up the physical changes of these ages in this way: "The difficulties of the sixties—let me count the bones and other body parts that don't work quite as well as they used to! It should be no surprise to anyone that as we age, our bodies develop certain limitations that have not existed before. I view this as a challenge to keep working as long as I can but just be mindful that the body won't always do what the brain tells it to. So I pace myself as best I can."

Until the middle of the twentieth century, it was thought that intelligence peaked in adolescence and then began to decline, and continued its descent over the remainder of a person's life. Today's research, however, has proven that incorrect, illustrating that some aspects of intelligence, such as vocabulary skills, increase.

Researchers speak of fluid intelligence, the ability to deal with new problems and situations, and crystallized intelligence, the ability to use the store of knowledge, skills, and strategies gained through experience and education to solve problems. Fluid intelligence tends to decline with age. Crystallized intelligence tends to increase with age. Facts like mathematical or chemical formulas, vocabulary size, and history dates are examples of crystallized intelligence.

Middle-aged adult thinking is unique. Adults in their mid fifties through mid seventies are typically more focused in specific directions, having gained insight and understanding from various life events. No longer viewing the world from an absolute and fixed perspective, middle adults have learned how to make compromises, question the establishment, and work through disputes.

Helen Fields recounts several studies illustrating that the mind gets sharper at a number of vitally important abilities, even while certain skills decline, as we get older: "In a University of Illinois study, older air traffic controllers excelled at their cognitively taxing jobs. . . . They were expert at navigating, juggle multiple aircraft simultaneously and avoiding collisions. . . . In a 2010 study, researchers at the University of Michigan presented 'Dear Abby' letters to 200 people and asked what advice they would give. Subjects in their 60s were better than younger ones at imagining different points of view, thinking of multiple resolutions and suggesting compromises."

Michele Rosenthal recounts recent fascinating research from the Center for Brain Health at the University of Texas at Dallas regarding cognitive development in our maturing years. Researchers studied brain changes in a random sampling of people ages fifty-six to seventy-one. They discovered that over a twelve-week period, participants in hour-long sessions of directed brain training exhibited an expanded ability to create structural connection between parts of the brain related to learning and greater information communication across critical brain regions. This research revealed that cognitive training increases brain blood flow,

a physiological marker of brain health. Previous research had shown brain blood flow decreases in people beginning in their twenties. The finding that global brain blood flow can be increased with complex mental activity suggests that staying mentally active helps reverse and potentially prevent brain losses and cognitive decline with aging. In fact, the study shows a more than 8 percent increase in brain blood flow, which significantly impacts cognitive performance and helps brains stay young, even as we age. A follow-up study a year later confirmed that the gains were maintained. Rosenthal indicates that training our brains is incredibly simple and can be done while moving through the tasks of each day.

Psycho-Social Development

The reality that persons develop through a predetermined unfolding of their personalities in eight stages comes to us from Erik Ericson. These psycho-social tasks are learned through complex social interactions within family, school, church, and other social environments. We can see all three of the adult stages of life at work in the mature adult years.

First, Erikson places the intimacy versus isolation struggle (the sixth stage) within young adulthood, but others have suggested it is also a part of the decade of the fifties. This conflict "may play itself out in various ways in the sixth decade of life: One may experience it in relationship with one or more of one's children, an aging parent, one's spouse or a lifelong partner, a long-time work associate—and the outcome of this conflict may not lead to new intimacy but to increased, even irrevocable, isolation" (Capps, 121). Some of this struggle is portrayed in the remarks of a friend: "I have two fears: first, that the walls that currently exist in my family because of religious differences will not come down during my lifetime, and second, that there will be no one to care for me in my later years as I am now caring for my mom."

Second, the seventh stage of Erik Erikson's theory, generativity versus stagnation, usually occurs between the forties through the sixties. Generativity focuses on establishing and guiding the next generation, but this can take many forms including service to others, creative activity in the arts, or establishing an organization. During this time, adults strive to create or nurture things that will outlast them. Contributing to society and doing things to benefit future generations are important aspects at the generativity stage of development. Generativity, then, at this time in life, is about "making your mark" on the world, through caring for others, creating things, and accomplishing things that make the world a better place. Stagnation refers to the failure to find a way to contribute—leading to feelings of disconnection with one's community and with society as a whole.

Third, late adulthood—ages sixty-five and older—is characterized by Erikson as integrity versus despair. During this period of time, people reflect back on the life they have lived and come away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life

well lived or a sense of regret and despair over a life misspent. Erikson believed that people who are satisfied with the life they had led—if all their developmental tasks had been accomplished and integrated into their personality—then their declining years would be a time of contentment. If they were not satisfied, they would have feelings of regret, that their life might have been wasted. A contented older adult may feel vindicated and wise, while discontented persons may feel despair as they focus on their failures. Those who feel proud of their accomplishments will feel a sense of integrity. Successfully completing this phase means looking back with few regrets and a general feeling of satisfaction. These individuals will attain wisdom, even when confronting death.

Family Life Cycle

Mature adults can experience many transitions in family life between the midfifties and midseventies. During this time parents will see their young adult children transition from the "family household" into their own living situations, and parents now in their fifties will, for the first time in several decades, have an "empty nest" household. Many young adult children will marry and have children, creating a new generation of grandparents. And many parents in their fifties and sixties will be engaged in caregiving for their own parents who are now in later adulthood.

Mature adulthood often begins with young adult children moving into their own living situations—and for many getting married and having children. Mature adults are not only dealing with the change in their own status as they make room for the next generation and prepare to move up to grandparental positions, but also with a different type of relationship with their own parents, who may become dependent, giving them considerable caretaking responsibilities. This can also be a liberating time, in that finances may be easier than during the primary years of family responsibilities and there is the potential for moving into new and unexplored areas—travel, hobbies, and new careers. For some families this stage is seen as a time of fruition and completion and as a second opportunity to consolidate or expand by exploring new avenues and new roles. For others it leads to disruption, a sense of emptiness and overwhelming loss, depression, and general disintegration. The phase necessitates a restructuring of the marital relationship now that parenting responsibilities are no longer required (Carter & McGoldrick, 18–19).

During their sixties and early seventies mature adults begin moving in the final stage of the family life cycle, "The Family in Later Life." Parents have sponsored the joining of families through marriage and, perhaps, eventually have entered the more objective nurturing role of grandparents, with its mediating and enlivening of faith and family traditions. Approaching this final phase involves planning for retirement, with its reconfigurations of identity, vocation, and spousal relationships. The adjustments to retirement may create the obvious vacuum for the retiring person, but may put a special strain on a marriage that until then has been

balanced in different spheres. Financial insecurity and dependence are also special difficulties, especially for family members who value managing for themselves. And, while loss of friends and relatives is a particular difficulty at this phase, the loss of a spouse is the most difficult adjustment, with its problems of reorganizing one's entire life alone after many years as a couple and of having fewer relationships to help replace the loss. Grandparenthood can, however, offer a new lease on life and opportunities for special close relationships without the responsibilities of parenthood (Carter & McGoldrick, 18–19).

Many mature adults experience being single again, after long years of marriage, either because of the death of their spouse or divorce. Research is showing that "the divorce rate among adults ages 50 and older doubled between 1990 and 2010. Roughly 1 in 4 divorces in 2010 occurred to persons ages 50 and older" (Brown & Lin, 2). "When it comes to divorce, the baby boomers are less conservative than younger generations: 66% say divorce is preferable to staying in an unhappy marriage, compared to 54% of younger adults who say so" (Cohn & Taylor).

Life Issues and Transitions

During their midfifties through midseventies, many mature adults use this time to reevaluate their lives, take stock of who they are, and examine long-held beliefs and values. This reevaluation often occurs in response to a sense of mortality, as mature adults realize that their youth is limited and they have not yet accomplished all of their desired goals in life. A mature adult participant in one of my classes said:

> I just turned sixty-four last week. There's a certain resolution that the really productive years are gone and what is left is reflection, review, and renewal. Actually, it is kind of weird. I am as busy as I ever was but my life tasks are very different than they have ever been. My tasks are centered on the work I do that produces a very small income, the work I do at the church, and the work I do to care for my eighty-five-year-old mom. I no longer have a career, a path to the future where my responsibilities will expand as will the paycheck. Instead there is a silence that exists in a job that is just work, has no challenges, and consists of never-ending tasks of busyness where there is no future because retirement is two years around the corner. That's sort of depressing when I put it in words, isn't it? But I don't feel that way.

Russell Haden Davis summarizes the key life issues and transitions of mature adulthood in this way:

- Mourning the lost body of youth and responding to the accompanying narcissistic injuries.

- Coming to terms with the cognitive changes related to a changed perspective on time and a personal, existential awareness of death.
- Securing a positive ratio of generativity over stagnation in order to enter late adulthood with a sense of integrity rather than despair.
- Moving from self-centeredness to God-centeredness through contemplation and individual development, so that, at sunset, we may embrace death as a passage to eternal life with the Creator and all redeemed creation (267).

Phyllis Moen describes mature adults as "midcoursers":

[Midcourse] connotes the period in which individuals begin to think about, plan for, and actually disengage from their primary career occupations and the raising of children; launch second or third careers; develop new identities and new ways to be productively engaged; establish new patterns of relating to spouses, children, siblings, parents, friends; leave some existing relationships and begin new ones. As in adolescence, people in the midcourse years are thinking about and enacting role shifts that are both products of their past and precursors of their future life course. . . . The fact that most retirees say that they retired 'to do other things' suggests that midcoursers are retiring to move to something else, not simply from boring or demanding jobs (270).

This brings us to the transition of retirement that is anticipated and approached from a variety of perspectives. "Boomers turning sixty-five agree that their feelings about the next five years can be described as exciting, fulfilling, confident, hopeful and optimistic, yet significant percentages also admit to feeling anxious, uncertain and stressed. Despite the substantial economic differences between 2006 and 2010, how boomers describe their feelings about the next five years has not changed, perhaps illustrating the inherent optimism that sometimes characterizes this generation or perhaps demonstrating the measured perspective that comes with age" ("Transitioning into Retirement," AARP, 4).

The Yankelovich Boomer Dreams Study surfaced worries about retirement. The top eight worries were (in order):

1. having sufficient health care—insurance coverage

2. getting sick and frail

3. having enough money to get by on

4. being able to live independently

5. not being mentally sharp

6. being short on energy and vitality

7. no longer being able to live life to the fullest

8. being in charge of your affairs (Smith & Clurman, 249)

In mid–March 2014, *The New York Times* featured its periodic retirement section. The lead article on retirement—a word from the old French meaning "to go off into seclusion" and which is defined in the dictionary as "the action or fact of leaving one's job and ceasing to work"—focused on retirees who were working for money and for purpose at a time of life when previous generations retired. The article illustrated that there has been a 50 percent increase in the percentage of individuals over sixty–five working during the past two decades. Another article described the sharp rise in social entrepreneurship among older individuals. The newspaper's weekly "Retiring" column is filled with stories about individuals doing the opposite of retiring, during the period of life when the golden years once reigned supreme.

Another significant transition for people at this age is the reality of facing death—people close to them, and eventually their own. In the words of a friend of mine: "As I age, I'm facing death more often. Though it has been many years since my father and in–laws have died, more of my friends are losing parents. With the sudden death of my brother last year, I've become much more aware of how fragile life is (physically and emotionally). I had to once confess that since Dan's death, pettiness has really become my pet peeve because so many take life for granted. I fear for the time when my mom dies. I will become an orphan. That sounds a bit funny coming from someone in their fifties, but it is a weird reality."

Generational Perspectives

The baby boomer generation comprises seventy–nine million US adults born between 1946 and 1960/64 who are in or moving into mature adulthood (mid 50s–mid 70s). This generation accounts for 26 percent of the total US population. By force of numbers alone, they almost certainly will redefine old age in America, just as they've made their mark on teen culture, young adult life, and middle age. Ten thousand boomers turn age sixty–five every day in America.

When asked what makes their generation unique, baby boomers named the following top five characteristics: 1) work ethic, 2) respectful, 3) values/morals, 4) "baby boomers," and 5) smarter (Taylor, 34). Frank Bonkowski creatively names the qualities of baby boomers:

- "A" qualities: adaptive, ambitious, antiwar
- "C" qualities: competitive, collaborative, communicative
- "E" qualities: educated, efficient, ethical
- "I" qualities: idealistic, involved, interested in making a difference
- "P" qualities: peer loyal, politically correct, positive
- "R" qualities: rebellious, results oriented, risk taker

Work, Retirement, and Health

According to the 2012 MetLife Study of baby boomers at sixty-five, "Transitioning into Retirement," almost one-half (45 percent) of sixty-five-year-old boomers are now fully retired (up from 19 percent in 2008), with another 14 percent reporting that they are retired but working part time or seasonally. At age sixty-five, 25 percent of boomers are working full time. On average, boomers who have not yet retired plan to do so by age sixty-eight and one-half.

Those who are fully retired identified the following reasons for retiring (in order): 1) reached retirement age/wanted to, 2) health reasons, 3) need to/tired of working, 4) laid off and couldn't find work, 5) could afford to/had enough money, 6) retirement incentive from employer, and 7) spouse retired ("Transitioning into Retirement").

Almost four in ten boomers at sixty-five (37 percent) who retired earlier than they had planned, identified the following reasons for doing so (in order): 1) health-related reasons, 2) loss of a job or job opportunities, and 3) have adequate resources. Those who retired later than they had planned identified the reasons for delaying retirement (in order): 2) needing a salary to pay for day-to-day expenses, 2) enjoying working and wanted to stay active, 3) needing to save more, and 4) needing to recover/rebuild finances ("Transitioning into Retirement").

The majority of boomers at sixty-five (63 percent) have also started receiving Social Security benefits; of those, half started collecting before they had originally planned. Six in ten boomers are at least somewhat confident in the ability of Social Security to provide adequate benefits for their lifetime ("Transitioning into Retirement").

Seven in ten retirees report liking retirement "a lot" while another two in ten say they "like it somewhat." The majority of boomers like the word *retirement* to describe their life stage and feel it is as they expected it to be. Their biggest concerns regarding retirement focus on having enough money, staying productive and useful, providing for their own or spouse's/partner's long-term care needs, and being able to afford health care in their retirement years ("Transitioning into Retirement").

Despite current difficult times, more than twice as many boomers at sixty-five (43 percent) are optimistic about the future in the long term than the less than one-fifth who are pessimistic. They are optimistic about their personal finances and their health. Those pessimistic about the future are most concerned about the government and the economy ("Transitioning into Retirement").

Boomers at sixty-five still feel that they are in good health, with 85 percent reporting excellent, very good, or good general health ratings. Almost two in ten report being in worse health than they were in 2008. Of those, half have suffered a major health problem in the past three years ("Transitioning into Retirement").

Family

The majority of boomers at sixty-five are married or in domestic partnerships (71 percent). Of the remainder, 12 percent are divorced, 10 percent are widowed, and 7 percent are single. The majority of boomers (84 percent) have children and, of those, 83 percent also have grandchildren. The proportion of boomers with grandchildren has increased from 77 percent in 2008. On average, boomers have two children and five grandchildren, an increase from three grandchildren in 2008 ("Transitioning into Retirement").

The numbers of multigenerational households are rapidly increasing in American society. Today more than 51.4 million Americans of all ages—or about one in six—live in multigenerational households. There is also a rise in grandparents caring for grandchildren with seven million grandparents living with a grandchild and approximately three million children being cared for primarily by that grandparent ("Five Facts about the Modern American Family," Pew Research Center).

A quarter (24 percent) of boomers at sixty-five have at least one living parent, while the majority (76 percent) does not have any living parents. The number of boomers who report having neither parent alive increased significantly from 67 percent in 2008 to 76 percent in 2011 ("Transitioning into Retirement").

The proportion of boomers providing care to a relative has remained stable at 14 percent, providing an average of eleven hours of care on a weekly basis: shopping, household chores, making meals, providing transportation, and so forth. One in five boomers at sixty-five spends more than twenty hours providing this type of care. There is no difference in the amount of time that women and men spend on providing care ("Transitioning into Retirement").

Technology Usage

Baby boomers grew up with TV (initially only three or four channels), record players, portable radios, touch-tone phones, and calculators. Things have changed dramatically in their lifetimes. They experienced the cable TV explosion of channels and diversity, and the transitions from 8-track tapes and cassettes and VHS tapes to CDs and DVDs. They were the first users of personal computers (Apple II in the late 70s; IBM PC in the early 80s) at work and at home. They were the first users of the Internet and of email (AOL) when "dial-up" connections were the norm at home. Over their adult lives they saw computers become mobile, the Internet accessible via high-speed broadband, phones become "smart," and the creation of social media, apps, and digital technologies. Baby boomers lived through the transition from an analog to digital world.

Of those ages fifty to sixty-four, 83 percent use computers somewhere in their lives—at work, school, home, or someplace else; and 56 percent of those sixty-five and older. Among adults fifty to sixty-four, 88 percent have a cell phone; and 74 percent for those sixty-five and older. For those fifty to sixty-four, 49 percent have

smart phones; and 19 percent for those sixty-five and older. For those fifty to sixty-four, 88 percent use the Internet, email, or access the Internet via a mobile device; and 57 percent for those sixty-five and older ("The Web at 25 in the U.S.," Pew Research).

As of January 2015, 63 percent of adults ages fifty to sixty-four were Facebook users and 56 percent of those sixty-five and older; 12 percent of adults ages fifty to sixty-four were Twitter users and 10 percent of those sixty-five and older; 11 percent of adults fifty to sixty-four were Instagram users and 6 percent of those sixty-five and older; 27 percent of adults fifty to sixty-four were Pinterest users and 17 percent of those sixty-five and older; and 30 percent of adults fifty to sixty-four were LinkedIn users and 21 percent of those sixty-five and older ("Social Media Update 2014," Pew Research).

Learning Style

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot writes that we must develop a compelling vision of later life: one that does not assume a trajectory of decline after fifty, but one that recognizes it as a time of change, growth, and new learning; a time when "our courage gives us hope." Whether by choice or not, many in their "third chapters" are finding ways to adapt, explore, and channel their energies, skills, and passions in new ways and into new areas. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot documents and reveals how the years between fifty and seventy-five may, in fact, be the most transformative and generative time in our lives, tracing the ways in which wisdom, experience, and new learning inspire individual growth and cultural transformation.

In *The Third Chapter* Lawrence-Lightfoot explores how women and men in their third chapters find ways of changing, adapting, mastering, and channeling their energies, skills, and passions into new domains of learning; and how they experience vulnerability and uncertainty, learn from experience and failure, seek guidance and mentoring, join work and play, rigor and spontaneity, and develop new relationships of mentoring and support. She writes,

> There is a "different kind of knowing" that many people found almost impossible to describe in words—a knowing that resides in the body, in the hands, fingers, and posture of a jazz pianist, in the unconscious dream life of a painter, in the shifts "from left to right brain" in the craft of a furniture maker. . . . Other interviewees talked about the empowering feeling of "discovering their voice"—a phrase they used both literally and metaphorically. Those who referred to it in the literal sense told stories about taking voice lessons, learning how to speak another language, and finding the courage to do public speaking. Those who used the phrase metaphorically, talked about discovering within themselves a newfound sense of authority and courage, of becoming truth tellers. Still

others spoke about "becoming a different person" in their Third Chapter, a learning process that involved the depths of their souls, a reconstruction and reorientation of their identity, their values, and their priorities. A businesswoman described the shift of focus in her life from "the external to the internal terrain"; an African American museum administrator and curator recalled the deepening of her racial identity and a "commitment" to her "ancestral legacies"; and an internationally renowned jazz musician claimed the full acceptance of his gay identity. "I used to say that I was a jazz musician who happened to by gay. Now I tell people I am a gay person who happens to be a jazz musician," he said without defensiveness.

I found these domains of new learning particularly intriguing for three reasons. First, because, as men and women talked about their learning, their stories were threaded through with a palpable yearning, deeply felt emotions, and what one interviewee called an "unfamiliar inarticulate-ness." In telling their experiences of gaining mastery, people searched for words to express the "rush of inchoate feelings." They would have to "show" me, rather than "tell" me, what they were learning—a painstak-ing demonstration of "fumbling mastery." Words were rarely enough to convey their feelings about "the interior and exterior chaos" that they experienced before making a "small, barely noticeable breakthrough" in their learning.

Second, the learning in all three of these realms seemed to require that people challenge their deeply imprinted cultural priorities and assump-tions that had formerly dominated their lives and often defined their suc-cess. Said a woman film director, who was trying to change the "pace and rhythm" of her life, "My parents always pushed speed and competi-tion—being fast, being first, being best—all very American ways of being. Now I'm trying to learn to slow down and go deeper. I want to live in the present, rather than spend all of my time anticipating—and fearing—the future." And many others told stories of seeking new ways of learning and living that cut against the grain of traditional definitions of achievement, success, and mastery that are typically reinforced in our society. Their new learning often felt like an "act of resistance."

Third, I was particularly fascinated by these domains of learning because of how they contrast with the relatively narrow cognitive learn-ing that goes on inside classrooms, how they depart from the standards and measures of achievement that are central preoccupations of educa-tional practitioners and policy makers. As a mater of fact, people often spoke of having to unlearn styles of learning—ways of processing infor-mation, and expectations of reward and reinforcement—that had worked for them in school but now felt inhibiting and counterproductive.

In each of the three realms of learning—body, voice, and soul—that I explore, women and men resist former habits of mind, styles of approach, and sources of identity that may have worked for them in the past, and substitute for them others that open up new pathways of energy, expression, productivity, and pleasure (173–75).

Lawrence-Lightfoot discovered that third chapter learners go through four stages when they are new learners:

1. They are deeply curious about the subject they have chosen to study.

2. They let go of their fear of failure and their fear of making a fool of themselves.

3. They display a willingness to be vulnerable.

4. They develop empathy and put themselves in the place of those who will become their teachers—often people from different backgrounds, cultures, geographies and generations (Ferede,1).

Spiritual and Religious Perspectives

Faith Development

Adult faith development can span several of James Fowler's stages of faith. The faith of some mature adults can be characterized as *synthetic-conventional*—a personal and largely unreflective synthesis of beliefs and values that supports one's identity and unites a person in emotional solidarity with others—that begins in adolescence and continues throughout a person's life. The authority and support for faith rests in the whole community of faith. The faith of some adults can be characterized as *individuative-reflective*—people begin to critically reflect on the beliefs and values formed in previous stages as they move toward an internalization and "owning" of faith where the authority for one's faith resides within one's self. This stage brings a new quality of responsibility for the self and for one's choices.

In mature adulthood we see *conjunctive* faith—the embrace and integration of opposites, or polarities, in one's life—realizing that one is both young and old, that youngness and oldness are held together in the same life. It means recognizing that we are both masculine and feminine, with all of the meanings those characterizations have. It means coming to terms with the fact that we are both constructive people and, inadvertently, destructive people. The apostle Paul captured this in Romans 7:19, 24: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Barbara Brown Taylor notes that mature adults experience the "sacrament of defeat":

> They live with the consequences of choices they cannot unchoose. They have been permanently shaped by commitments they cannot unmake. Yet there is still a lot of undoing at this stage, as people let go of many of the certainties about themselves and the world that they earlier worked so hard to put in place. The boundaries of the tribe no longer hold. With the gravitas that arrives when life is more than half over, people at this stage are ready to spend and to be spent, emptying their pockets in one last-ditch effort to make meaning (143).

In the conjunctive stage, symbol and story, metaphor and myth, both from our own traditions and from others, seem to be newly appreciated. Having looked critically at traditions and translated their meanings into conceptual understandings, one experiences a hunger for a deeper relationship to the reality that symbols mediate. In that deeper relationship, we learn again to let symbols have the initiative with us. It is immensely important to let biblical narrative draw people into it and let it read their lives, reforming and reshaping, rather than their own reading and forming their own meanings of the text.

Commenting on conjunctive faith, Peter Feldmeier writes, "Fowler's fifth stage moves beyond personal and institutional disillusionment to the very core of one's faith tradition, and this while appreciating other religious ways. There is little need to be wholly attached to or identified with its structure in conjunctive faith. New and even contrasting information or perspectives can be held in the soul without abandoning one's faith . . . because conjunctive faith takes the posture of openness and nonattachment, one is more open to conversion. Conjunctive faith is not afraid of investigating other forms of religiosity. This is simply the risk of being open, mature, and integrated (193).

Religiosity and Faith Practice

In 2012, Pew Research found that 15 percent of adults ages fifty to sixty-four and 9 percent of adults sixty-five and older were unaffiliated from organized religion ("'Nones' on the Rise," Pew Research). Of baby boomers (1946–64), 43 percent report that they are stronger members of their faith tradition (Pew Research). The General Social Surveys reports that 32 percent of boomers attend worship every week or nearly every week; 62 percent say they pray daily; 60 percent say that religion is important to them; and 65 percent say that they know God exists, with no doubts.

Many baby boomer adults are interested in spirituality but see no need to attend church. "Boomers are embracing spirituality in their own unique way, transforming the religious landscape of America and giving birth to a broader 'spiritual

marketplace' that incorporates many spiritual perspectives, including both traditional and non-traditional religious communities" (Transforming Life after 50). Boomers are seeking "a self-reflective quest for individual wholeness, a search for depth and meaning, as well as guidance for living one's life. As boomers grow older, they tend to recognize that spirituality must be cultivated through practice, and that there will be no 'quick fix' when it comes to spiritual depth. Spirituality will most likely remain a significant aspect of their lives for the remainder of their lives" (Transforming Life after 50).

The rise of the Christian megachurch in the 1980s and 1990s was due in large part to boomers' search for personal meaning and spirituality, for spiritual practices, for answers to religious questions, and for religious education for their children. They looked for churches that were less traditional and that had a contemporary message, worship, music, and ministry. They looked for churches they emphasized belonging, spirituality, and service. By some estimates two-thirds of all boomers left organized religion in the 1960s and 70s, but almost half that group returned to church participation, most often in the new "seeker-oriented" Christian megachurches.

In summary we can identify at least eight important religious characteristics of mature adults: 1) faith exploration and searching, 2) desire for belonging, 3) spiritual weaving—creating multilayered meaning systems, 4) commitment to relationships, 5) search for community (hospitality, welcome, warmth), 6) interest in spirituality rather than only orthodox belief, 7) diversity of religious needs and expressions, and 8) integration of faith with family, work, politics, education, health care, and moral and ethical codes.

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Older Adulthood

DOROTHY LINTHICUM

▌▌▌▌▌▌ Chapter 6 explores older adulthood—adults in their midseventies and older. American culture provides most people an instant mental picture when references are made for people over seventy-five. No matter what is said, what is heard is loss and failure: the deaths of spouses, friends, and family; a slow loss of hearing and eyesight; the wearing out of joints and other body parts; and a fading of memories and logic. In middle age, people begin to fear aging and make jokes early on when car keys mysteriously disappear or they walk into rooms with no idea why they are there.

> A continuing education student in her midseventies enrolled in my class on aging. Almost ten years previously, she and a group of friends had faced retirement and all the changes that resulted in their lives. They had read and discussed books together, explored new interests, and supported each other as losses began to mount.

> They found themselves in a good place, only to be jarred by new challenges as they grew older together. Aging in place, which seemed the logical choice for everyone in the group, now wasn't working for some in the group: a few could no longer afford to live

in a pricey urban/suburban location, while others discovered their current housing did not match their health needs.

Their outlook on life was changing from the heady days of energy and focus that came soon after retirement. In many ways, this new outlook wasn't bad or negative, but it was different. So one person in the group signed up for my course, hoping for some insight, but also content if she came away with a list of new books for her group to tackle.

People say that every decade of life brings new challenges, whether they are in their twenties or in their eighties. Many churches often have one category for everyone over thirty—adults—that does not recognize the subtle or substantial differences among the developmental, generational, or spiritual stages of life. Even when churches provide programming and pastoral care for those over sixty-five, there rarely is a focus on their differences.

The dramatic increase in the number of people reaching age sixty-five, coupled with their increased life expectancy, has expanded the classification of those age sixty-five and older to include three subpopulations commonly referred to as the "young old," the "old," and the "oldest-old" groups (http://transgenerational.org/aging/demographics.htm).

1. The "young old" (65–74) were explored in chapter 5.

2. The "old" (75–84) is relatively small compared to the rising boomers, but people in this category rarely see themselves as "old." Many in this group are still active and involved with their families, communities, and churches.

3. The "oldest-old" (85+) is proportionately the fastest-growing segment of the total population today. Most in this grouping are radically different than they were, not only in middle age, but also in their "young old" age. Their growth rate is twice that of those sixty-five and over and almost four times that for the total population. In the United States, this group now represents 10 percent of the older population and will more than triple by 2050 (New Realities of an Older America).

It is important to avoid what author Susan Jacoby describes as the "disingenuous practice of lumping together all people over sixty-five" (11–12). Lumping together sixty-five, seventy-five, and eighty-five-year-olds for statistics regarding their physiological and psychological condition makes as much sense as lumping together five, fifteen, and twenty-five-year-olds for statistics about the young. For example, based on the misleading statistical practice of lumping disparate age groups, only 5 percent of those over sixty-five are confined to nursing homes. But, the likelihood of spending time in a nursing home jumps to 50 percent in the eighty-five+ age group (Jacoby, 11–12).

This chapter presents developmental, generational, and religious/spiritual per‑spectives on older adulthood drawn from a variety of research studies and analysis.

Developmental Perspectives

Physiological and Cognitive Changes

During young adulthood, most physiological and cognitive functions are at their most efficient levels. By the time people reach their middle to late twenties, most of the physical growth and development of muscles, internal organs, and body systems reach a plateau. During the forties and fifties when physical changes begin to affect behavior and performance, people start noticing them (Hayslip & Panek). When people reach the seventies, they've learned how to live with chronic health issues that go far beyond hearing and vision loss.

Changes occur throughout the body by age seventy-five. There are changes in muscle strength, muscle mass and tone, and the way fat is distributed in the body. Bones are more brittle and more easily broken.

> *Accustomed to working around the house and outside, a youthful seventy-five-year-old climbed a ladder to clean the gutters. Harold was careful not to overreach or lean too far in one direction. After finishing the chore, he began to back down the ladder, which was firmly grounded in a flower bed. Several rungs before his descent was complete, his foot slipped and he fell, landing on one heel. Thankfully, the surrounding bushes broke his fall and kept him from a serious head injury. But the heel was shattered.*
>
> *After months in different casts and several rounds of physical therapy, he could walk again. But he lost the confidence he had before the fall. He was aware that one misstep could cause months of pain and recovery. After weeks of convalescence, the muscles in his legs had lost their mass and tone as well as their strength. The fall not only affected his physical health, but also left him feeling vulnerable.*

Bones and muscles are not the only parts of the musculoskeletal system affected by age. Flexibility in connective tissues and joints decreases, which can make walk‑ing and other exercise difficult. Slowly the swelling of joints changes how people do certain tasks and even choose what to wear. Arthritis can make simple tasks and favorite hobbies too painful to enjoy.

The soundness of the cardiovascular system is affected by exercise, smoking, and general health. Although the heart loses about 1 percent of its reserve pumping capacity each year after age thirty, reducing the amount of oxygen delivers to tis‑sues, for most people it is still at 81 percent of its peak efficiency at age eighty-five. The immune, respiratory, digestive, and endocrine systems continue to decline as

people age, but are still effective unless weakened by disease or genetic preconditions. Wrinkles and gray hair, the external and observable changes of aging, are a result of a decrease in the flexibility of collagen fibers. The use of skin and hair products to minimize these changes is usually consistent with a person's earlier habits of personal care.

The ability to think, reason, and act in response to incoming stimulation from the environment depends on the integrity of the central nervous system, which is composed of the brain and the spinal cord. Until recently, many scientists thought brain cells died as people aged, shrinking their brains and shedding bits of information that were gone forever. New findings indicate that cells in disease-free brains regenerate; it's the connections between them that break. With this new perspective has come an explosion of research into how to keep those connections and brain functions intact for longer (Berkowitz & Cuadra).

While common wisdom says that it is difficult for old people to learn new skills—"you can't teach an old dog new tricks"—that appears to be a misconception. Prior research has made clear that even after brain damage, for instance after a stroke, the brain has an amazing ability to regenerate lost function. After damage to one part of the brain, other areas of the brain are able to compensate by learning new functions. This ability is known as neuroplasticity and appears to carry on throughout life (Jones).

The cognitive issue that frightens and alarms many people is dementia; the most common types are caused by strokes (vascular) or disease (Alzheimer's or Parkinson's). People over eighty-five are much more likely to show signs of dementia than those under eighty. Caregiving for people with dementia is a critical issue as people live longer and older age groups swell in numbers.

Joan's family began noticing that their eighty-two-year-old mother, Maureen, had begun to lose her sharpness several years ago. Maureen lived alone in a fairly isolated location, several hours from the closest child. The family was able to ignore her bouts of forgetfulness—birthdays that went unnoted and questions that were asked repeatedly—but the unpaid bills were alarming. At one point the water was turned off for lack of payment, and threats of other cancellations began to pile up. On the telephone, Maureen sounded like her old self, poking fun and laughing. But in person, Joan realized that her mother was losing ground quickly.

At first the siblings all stepped up, inviting Maureen to long visits at their homes and cleaning her house and gardens that had been neglected. Joan, who lived on the other side of the country, began to work on her mother's finances and to contact realtors about selling Maureen's house. Maureen didn't have a lot of assets, and the sale of the small house would provide only a modest amount after the mortgage was paid. After several months, the family's united front began to crumble. Maureen ended up living with Joan, thousands of miles from her home and other members of the family. Joan seemed to be juggling their lives well while she worked full time, ran

marathons, and traveled with her mother. Eventually she found daycare for Maureen, who could no longer be left on her own. No one realized how difficult Joan's life became until she called in sick at her office, notified her siblings, and checked into the hospital with depression.

Joan's story is not unusual. The toll of providing twenty-four-hour care, seven days a week, wearies even the strongest. While Joan was lucky that her mother was good natured and agreeable most of the time, she still had to deal with Maureen's memory loss and inability to think logically about the simplest of tasks. The story is far from over; no one knows what the next chapter will bring.

On the whole, people of all cultures are living longer, healthier lives. While dementia is a reality for many of those over eighty-five, just as many people live into their nineties and beyond with memory and logic intact. Bodies may not be as efficient as they once were, but even among oldest old, bones mend, wounds heal, and life goes on.

Psycho-Social Development

Determining when a person reaches "old age" can be problematic. Donald Capps argues that old age begins in the eighth decade, sometime after a person reaches seventy (148). The crisis of integrity versus despair and disgust in stage 8 from Erik Erikson's theory of life stages is often central for those in their seventies. From Erikson's early descriptions of life stages, this was to be the final crisis. But that thinking changed as Erik and his wife Joan, themselves, began to live into their eighties.

By the time people are seventy-five, they are fully engaged in the eighth crisis, pitting integrity against despair. The definition Erikson uses for integrity is not an esoteric description of moral principle; it is much deeper and robust. Ego integrity is a result of the bringing together all the preceding stages of life, adapting to the "triumphs and disappointments" gradually growing the fruit of oneness (Erikson 1980, 98). In the extended version of *The Life Cycle Completed,* Joan Erikson says, "Life in the eighth stage includes a retrospective accounting of one's life to date; how much one embraces life as having been well-lived, as opposed to regretting missed opportunities, will contribute to the degree of disgust and despair one experiences. As Erik Erikson has reminded us, "Despair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and try out alternate roads . . ." (Erikson 1998, 113).

Another important dimension to Erikson's eighth stage is wisdom, both as a basic strength exhibited at this time of life and as a related principle of social order. Joan Erikson defines wisdom in this stage as the "capacity to see, look and remember, as well as to listen, hear, and remember. Integrity, we maintain, demands tact, contact, and touch" (Erikson 1998, 112). Consistent with this description is Capps's definition of wisdom, which is "not equated with esoteric knowledge or abstract

theorizing. Rather it is practical, sensible, and capable of explaining why wisdom provides a person the authority to recommend *this* over *that* course of action" (Capps, 153).

What Capps calls the "wise self," comes in part from the ability of older people to jettison some of the rules and regulations that have bound their lives. In art, for example, painters in their later years do not necessarily change their styles as much as they embrace the freedom to move into new space. He says that "wisdom is not necessarily reflected in the fact that one has more years of experience than those who are younger but that one's perspectives on the world and on human relationships reflect an inner sense of liberation from the rules, roles, and rituals of the past" (Capps, 169).

Joan Erikson argues that by the ninth and tenth decades of life, many people do not have the "luxury of such retrospective despair" (Erikson 1998, 113). Capps agrees that the dynamic conflict between integrity and despair "is superseded by other conflicts in these subsequent decades (148). He suggests that gracefulness becomes a new dynamic for people in their eighties, "a worthy successor to wisdom" (Capps, 175).

A myth about aging says that as long as people eat right, exercise, and stay healthy, they will dance their way into and through old age. Writers like Milton Crum, who wrote a monograph when he was eighty-seven entitled *I'm Old,* debunk this rosy picture: "My illusion was that, if I took proper care of my body, as the years passed, I would become the still-vigorous *wellderly*, not the *illderly"* (13–14). He defines frailty as a "condition, sometimes lasting years that most old people endure before death during which various ailments conspire to make death more attractive than life. His summation of the last years of his life hardly seems graceful.

Joan Erikson argues that as people approach their nineties, they "have one firm foothold to depend on." She believes that people are blessed with basic trust from the beginning; the first of Erikson's stages that begins in infancy deals with the crisis of trust versus mistrust. Without trust, says Joan, "life is impossible, and with it we have endured . . . it has accompanied and bolstered us with hope . . . no matter how severely hope has been challenged, it has never abandoned us completely" (Erikson 1998, 113).

Older people are less likely to be "victims" of life forces, argues Froma Walsh, and more likely to be resilient, with the ability to shape as well as to be shaped by events. She credits transcendence, which provides the freedom to risk, with courage, new horizons rather than focusing on limitations.

A continued debate about the best ways for older people to face challenges of aging pits disengagement theorists against "activity theory." Disengagement encourages withdrawal from social activities to help "the individual prepare for death by loosening their emotional bounds with others" (Lyon, 274). Activity theory espouses the exact opposite.

Bob, a ninety-two-year-old, who still lives alone on a farm in Oklahoma, rides horses, and goes on trail rides, is firmly in the second school. Until recently, he remained active in his profession as a PhD chemist, traveling as a consultant throughout the country. He argues that an active life with intellectual pursuits and physical exercise will stave off dementia and poor health. Although his wife died of Alzheimer's disease ten years previously, he believes an active life could forestall even that disease.

Gerotransendence is a disengagement theory that arose in the 1980s to describe how people deal with being frail and challenges to maintain hope. A name closely associated with this term, Lars Tornstam, described it as a "shift in meta perspective, from a materialistic and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction" (55–63).

From a *New York Times* blog by Paula Span:

When I asked Lars Tornstam, a Swedish sociologist, for an example of the state he calls gerotranscendence, he described a hypothetical daughter planning a cocktail party. Her elderly mother usually attends the affairs and enjoys herself, so the daughter invites her as usual—but this time, the mother declines. Naturally, the daughter worries. Is her mother ill? Depressed? This is not like her.

But perhaps there's nothing wrong, said Dr. Tornstam, who has been investigating aging for more than 25 years. Our values and interests don't usually remain static from the time we're 20 years old until the time we're 45, so why do we expect that sort of consistency in later decades?

"We develop and change; we mature," he told me in a phone interview from his home in Uppsala, Sweden. "It's a process that goes on all our lives, and it doesn't ever end. The mistake we make in middle age is thinking that good aging means continuing to be the way we were at 50. Maybe it's not."

An increased need for solitude, and for the company of only a few intimates, is one of the traits Dr. Tornstam attributes to this continuing maturation. So that elderly mother isn't deteriorating, necessarily—she's evolving.

"People tell us they are different people at 80," Dr. Tornstam explained. "They have new interests, and they have left some things behind."

Walsh's description of transcendence emphasizes resiliency. She describes both the drive that comes from activity and the reflection that comes from transcendence (Walsh, 319). As in most of life, the weaving of the two apparent opposites results in a stronger, more vibrant lifestyle.

Crum and others point to the lack of understanding of old age by those who may study and write about it, but have not lived it. Even longtime researcher Elaine Brody, who tracked the lives of older women, noted when she was in her late eighties that her biggest surprise about aging was the "unexpectedness of the expected" (Woo). Perhaps the only way to truly understand those in their ninth and tenth decades is to be in those decades ourselves.

Family Life Cycle

As people enter the final cycle of life, they can improve the quality of their lives by making the most of options that are open to them. Options vary according to wealth, health, and other variables. Most have already begun to cope with bodies that no longer function as well as they used to, from downsizing living quarters to making more lists and using calendar prompts and apps to remember important engagements. Studies of family function show that a variety of adaptive strategies rather than a single pattern result in a more successful later life adjustment (Walsh, 319).

While most older people in America and their adult children maintain separate households, Walsh notes, they have frequent contact, close emotional ties, and mutual support that she calls "intimacy at a distance" (Walsh, 309). Close contact with family members greatly benefits older people, who are likely to live longer than those with fewer connections. The younger family members also benefit from the wisdom and experience of their parents and grandparents.

The family life of older people is perhaps more related to ethnicity and cultural differences than by age. This is becoming more important as diversity continues to increase among our oldest population. In the next thirty-five years, minorities will account for most of the growth of older people in the United States ("New Realities of an Older America").

There are some generalities that apply to most families that have members in their later seventies, eighties, and nineties. Not surprisingly, myths from our culture do not reflect reality. One myth portrays older people living their final years alone, either estranged from or with no living family members. In their study of *The Changing Family Life Cycle,* Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick dispute this notion. They indicate that most adults over age sixty-five do not live alone, but with other family members. More than 80 percent live within an hour of at least one of their children. Even though many older people move into assisted living or nursing home facilities, most still retain close ties with family members.

Lyon observes that while 75 percent of older Americans are grandparents, most are involved with their grandchildren episodically as opposed to continuously (279). At the same time, their presence and wisdom seem to be important in families, and they often provide financial and emotional support in times of trouble, such as economic shortfalls, illness, or divorce. By the time people are seventy-five,

they have established their role as grandparent in families and may be reliving their role as parent in similar circumstances.

Among poor and minority communities, grandparenting usually starts earlier. Grandmothers, who may be in their forties, often must provide child care. This responsibility filters up to great-grandparents as well (Walsh 312). The toll of raising two or more families is often a shorter life span and poorer health during their latter years.

How people in their late seventies and eighties handle power shifts can either strengthen family connections or make them weaker. Some refuse to give up authority to the next generation, while others cede all power much too quickly, becoming totally dependent (Carter & McGoldrick, 20). Frailty can make older family members more dependent, but the role of parent or elder allows these family members to remain models for the next generation who face their own aging.

Life Issues and Transitions

By the time people are seventy-five they have already mapped out the way retirement will look or are in the process of doing so. Retirement, says Walsh, is a significant milestone and adjustment for individuals and couples. The retiree, male or female, loses meaningful job roles, status, and relationships that are key to one's identity and self-esteem. For women, it can also mean financial disaster. Income reduction for couples or individuals can add stress to relationships compounded by residential change, a common result of retirement. "A successful transition involves a reorientation of values and goals and a redirection of energies and relationships" (Walsh, 310). Walsh argues that successful adaptation to retirement requires couples to "renegotiate their relationship to achieve a new balance." Transitions at this stage of life require negotiations, compromise, and flexibility.

Older generations already enjoy longer lives, better health, and more active lifestyles than previous generations. Still, the overwhelming majority will also face a growing and continuous challenge of maintaining their independence, an issue of high priority among this age group.

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), upon retirement today, most older people want to stay where they are, preferring to grow old in their own homes, aging in place ("Aging in Place"). Successful aging in place, however, demands that homes not only provide continued enjoyment and stimulation, they must also support declining functional limitations. Many homes do not have the architectural capability needed for long-term residence. Not all stairs, for example, can accommodate chair lifts. Refitting doorways and bathrooms to make them handicapped accessible may not be possible, even if owners can afford the price tag. In addition, mass transit is often not easily accessible for older people, many of whom live in suburbs. This impacts not only their ability to go places without a car, but also the ability of non-family caregivers to reach them.

By the time people reach their midseventies, they have made adjustments to changes in family life resulting from retirement, including decreased income and shifts in schedules. Couples in successful marriages have often developed a rhythm and balance that recognizes individual differences and preferences. Single people who never married, were divorced, or lost a spouse, have either learned to live alone or are finding ways to cope with loss and go in new directions.

People over seventy-five were among the first in the United States to be affected by "a peculiarly modern notion of old age as a period of retirement" that is thought by many to be related to the government-sponsored programs, Social Security and Medicare (Lyon, 278). In the past, retirement lasted only a few brief years, if at all. Now people who retire at sixty-five or seventy can expect to live another fifteen to twenty years.

The most difficult adjustment in this time of life is often the loss of a spouse. The deaths of friends and other family members make the adjustment to single life more difficult because there are simply fewer people to help fill the loss.

> As an active ninety-two-year-old widower, Bob is making new friends among those ten to twenty years younger than he is. His old circles no longer exist as his friends have either died or require nursing home care. He walks in a mall with his new friends several mornings a week and is planning an overseas trip with several of them. Although his new friends are important to him, they don't completely fill his loss. They don't share his memories of combat from World War II and most never knew his wife. He enjoys the companionship these new friends bring him, but he misses those who also shared the major events that molded his life.

Pew Research shows that about 40 percent of those ages seventy-five to eighty-four are married, but only 21 percent of those eighty-five or older are married and 66 percent are widowed. The numbers by gender tell another story: 64 percent of men over seventy-five are married, while only 18 percent of women in that age group are married. Women continue to be more likely to outlive their male spouses as they age ("Getting Older in America," Pew Research).

Generational Perspectives

People in the eighth and ninth decades of life are part of the builder generation—also known as the silent generation—generally identified as those born between 1925 and 1945, now age seventy to ninety. This cohort, along with the preceding generation, was responsible for the radical growth in construction following World War II in all sectors, including churches, throughout the country. During this time there was an assault on political freedom and thus "silenced" an entire generation. They followed "the greatest generation" (a term coined by journalist Tom Brokaw to describe the preceding generation), who are now over ninety years of age.

People in both generations grew up during the Great Depression and either fought in or lived through World War II. Their behavior as a group is based on experiences from those two world events (Strauss and Howe). The builder generation has been described as being highly ambitious and having a need for achievement, power, and status. It has been suggested that the economic suffering and loss of status during the Great Depression led to this generation's ambitions to rise above these losses.

People in the builder and great generations in workforce studies have been labeled "traditionalists," based on their values and characteristics (Kane). They tend to value traditional morals, safety, and security and embrace conformity, commitment and consistency.

As the builder generation began to move out of the workforce and into retirement, however, their actions and beliefs could be labeled visionary or idealist. In churches and other religious organizations, many mission and outreach initiatives domestically and overseas began with the efforts of people who are now over seventy-five. They helped to build hospitals in Africa, schools in Asia, and orphanages in Central America. It is easy to overlook the visionary character of this generation because of their pragmatism and common sense.

At the same time, the builder generation has been described as being highly ambitious and having a need for achievement, power, and status. A study from the University of Iowa described them as having respect for authority, and known for loyalty, hard work, and a willingness to sacrifice for the common good.

Both the builder and great generations are known as the wealthiest, in comparison to other generations born after 1945. The typical household in 2009, headed by someone over age sixty-five had forty-seven times as much net wealth as the typical household headed by someone under age thirty-five. Although these figures do not adequately reflect conditions after the recent recession, the gap is still significant and has implications for family relationships ("The Rising Age Gap in Economic Well-Being," Pew Research).

Relationship to Institutions and Authority

About 95 percent of those in the builder generation are retired at this point. In a few short years, noted one writer, "virtually no [builder] will command an industry, a battlefield, anything at all. They will have mostly gone well into the background" (http://jamesrbrett.com/TheSilentGeneration). Many of the characteristics that defined them at work carry over into retirement. They were loyal to employers and expected loyalty in return. Unlike people in the workforce today who are responsible for their own retirement accounts, many of the builders and greats began retirement with work-related pensions and healthcare benefits. They tend to see this as their reward for their loyalty to businesses and corporations that often moved them around the country.

Because many in the workforce tended to stay with one firm or business, people in this age group were able to develop excellent interpersonal skills. Their loyalty to one company was consistent with their beliefs that promotions, raises, and recognition should result from job tenure (Straus and Howe, 79). Work ethics were measured by productivity and meeting deadlines; workers valued being a part of a larger organization and found it unnecessary to draw attention to themselves. They favored a top-down chain of command and were team players who understood the important of sacrificing for the common good.

When the corporate rules changed in the seventies and eighties, some were caught off guard: they had paid their dues and expected their employers to take care of them. While some have lived well in retirement from company pensions, others have watched retirement and health care funding disappear or be sharply curtailed as companies went into bankruptcy or closed altogether.

Two major programs in the United States have had a tremendous impact on older people: Medicare and Social Security. Before Medicare was enacted in 1965, only 25 percent of older people had meaningful private hospital insurance. Upon implementation of Medicare, hospital insurance coverage for older people rose to almost 100 percent. Medicare was responsible for a remarkable and substantial decline in the financial burden of out-of-pocket spending by older people for health care associated with serious illness (Finkelstein & McKnight, 1644–69).

Almost 90 percent of people age sixty-five and older receive some of their family income from Social Security (Policy Basics). Without Social Security benefits, about 44 percent of elderly Americans would have incomes below the official poverty line (all else being equal); with Social Security benefits, only 9.1 percent are in poverty. Social Security benefits raise 15.3 million elderly Americans—including 9.0 million women—above the poverty line (Van de Walter et al). Older people have come to rely on both Medicare and Social Security to cushion or completely support their financial needs.

Family Relationships

Family life for people over seventy-five continues to change as spouses die, adult children move in and out of communities, and grandchildren enter adolescence or young adulthood. Families look different today because of declining birth rates, health care advances, and increased longevity (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Population studies also indicate that the aging population is becoming more racially and culturally diverse, with greater numbers of single older adults.

Changes in family structures have affected the way older people relate to extended family members, often relying more on negotiation rather than traditional values (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs). This is especially true in blended families where older people must find their way among stepchildren and others in the family structure.

Lyon notes that negotiated relationships among families with ethnic and racial variations no longer are based on "white" values of self-reliance and independence. Asian American, African American, and Hispanic families, he says, "draw on a much wider kin network" (Lyon, 280).

Erikson's theory of human development says that finding meaning in earlier life experiences is critical for older people to avoid despair as they begin to face death. He suggests that in this adaptive process comes wisdom that arises from the "meaningful interplay between beginning and end as well as some finite sense of summary and, possible, a more active anticipation of dying" (Erikson 1998, 63). Families have looked to their elders in the past, although more recently they are looking for models among friends or even media personalities. "For the most resilient aged people, past traumas and inescapable missteps are ultimately put into perspective. Even those who have not achieved integration are actively involved in attempts to reach some resolution" (Walsh, 320).

It is often in family settings that older people come to terms with the integration of their lives. Walsh notes that individuals and families "organize, interpret, and connect experiences in many different ways." The events of a lifetime, the culture in which they occurred, and the people with whom they were shared all contribute to the meaning of life. In families, elders that have the resilience for self-renewal can help younger generations make meaning of their own experiences. By doing this, older people share their wisdom to create a better life for those who follow them.

At the same time, older people who have close relationships with grandchildren rely on these relationships to give them comfort and companionship. But just as children push away from parents during adolescence and early adulthood, grand-children may feel the need to separate from grandparents, at least temporarily. Inherent in any relationship is the giving and taking from both sides. Strong ties between grandparents and grandchildren can result in the sharing of wisdom and companionship from either side.

An expanded perspective of family development and aging is needed that looks at the potential for growth and meaning instead of only focusing on the negative impacts of change and loss, argues Walsh. "The family as a system, along with its elder members, confronts major adaptational challenges in later life. Changes with retirement, grandparenthood, illness, death, and widowhood alter complex rela-tionship patterns, often requiring family support, adjustment to loss, reorientation, and reorganization" (Walsh, 310). She believes these challenges present opportuni-ties for transformation and growth within family relationships.

Work–Life Balance

As noted elsewhere, 95 percent of people over seventy-five are retired, although some have part-time consulting jobs and many are active volunteers in churches,

nonprofit organizations, and agencies. One study noted that as a group, people over seventy-five continue to have a deep respect for authority in the workplace, and value loyalty, hard work, and sacrifice for the common good. They embraced the idea of "living to work versus working to live" ("The Silent Generation").

Communication Style

The cohort that makes up the builder generation were also called the silent generation for a reason. When they were young, they were often pushed aside by members of the great generation, even though the experiences of the latter were just as formative. They are still marked by the Great Depression and growing up during World War II. Before they could make their own mark, the baby boomers started arriving and making changes related to their sheer numbers. Caught in between these two dominating cohorts, the builders were noted for being stoic and pragmatic (Strauss & Howe, 79).

As a whole, this group is often more likely to act than to speak. They are still the backbone of many civic and religious organizations because of their commitment, reliability, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good. Their communications are direct, often written, and timely—a reflection of the pragmatic nature of many in the builder generation.

Learning Styles

Not surprisingly, people over seventy-five usually prefer brick-and-mortar educational institutions and traditional lecture formats to online, web-based education. For the most part, they grew up in a hierarchical system of education in which the teacher was the expert. As students, the builders were often passive learners expecting to take in information and give it back out.

Higher education was a privilege enjoyed by the wealthy and by men. By the time the feminist movement took off in the seventies, most women were already in roles as homemakers, teachers, and nurses. The revolution that pushed boomer women into professions like law and journalism passed most women by in the builder and great generations.

Not surprisingly, the builders often prefer to learn from an expert, either a live or recorded "talking head" who gives out information. Question and answer sessions are useful, but only in the context of an informational presentation. Small group discussions sometimes work, especially if topics are informational or problem solving. Topics that invite more personal and relational responses can be threatening, and therefore avoided by some older participants.

Traditional Bible studies, especially among women, are highly regarded among this age group. In a more intimate gathering, participants are willing to share their ideas and insights, but often feel more comfortable with a facilitator or prepared

curriculum. If asked to share intimate stories or feelings, many in this age group are likely to respond with stoic silence.

Technology Usage

As a whole, the builders that are still in the workforce or work as volunteers are less technologically adept than the younger generations, primarily because they are usually slow to change their work habits. As technology evolves and changes, they often struggle to learn new technology and work processes.

The navigation through technology that seems second nature to young people often leaves older people confused and feeling inadequate. Much of the new software and many apps are created by young people who base their strategies on a user's intuition, rather than separate written instructions. Older users prefer written and/or guided instructions, and approach new devices and apps with the fear that they will "break" something by tapping the wrong button or icon.

That is not to say as a group they are inept at technology. They have learned the basics in order to communicate with children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren and to function in a world that is swiftly going digital. They at least know when they need assistance in filling out online forms or completing basic banking and other transactions.

In a Pew Research Internet Project survey, between 80 and 89 percent of those over age seventy-five who use the Internet communicate with email, while 70 to 79 percent used it for search functions. About half who were on the Internet surf it for health information, to buy a product, to get news, or to make travel arrangements (Zickuhr).

Between 2009 and 2010 use of social media by people over sixty-five doubled. One of the biggest drawbacks to a wider use of the Internet, according to Pew reports, is the lack of high-speed access. Those using the Internet primarily for email access, which includes the majority of internet users over age seventy-five, don't see lack of broadband as a disadvantage. After they begin to use it, however, they begin to see how it improves other uses of the Internet that they apparently enjoy, such as making purchases, accessing news, and keeping up with health news (Madden).

Religious Expression and Worship Style

In many mainline churches and other places of worship, congregations skew old, with faithful churchgoers from the builder and great generations who are now being joined by older boomers. Pew research from 2008 notes that about half of the members of mainline churches and Jewish synagogues are fifty and older, compared with approximately four in ten American adults overall ("Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Research). Older members, especially those over seventy-five,

have been responsible for being the head, hands, and feet of many church minis-tries, from altar guilds and church receptions to Meals-on-Wheels and homeless shelter duty. They are disappointed that the projects they have led and supported for years seem to be of little interest to younger church members.

> *The annual antique show at All Saints had been around for more than forty years and become a fixture in the community. The proceeds from space rental and gener-ous home-cooked dinners also gave the annual budget a significant boost. Almost every person in the congregation was involved to insure its success. People were needed to change day school classrooms into display areas, cook hundreds of dinners, serve as hostesses or waiters, direct traffic, and keep visitors moving and happy. It was an enormous challenge the builder generation gladly accepted year after year. Changes from inside and outside the church began to impact the annual event. A new pastor arrived with different priorities, the county health department required all food for the lavish dinners be prepared on the premises rather than in homes, vendors had found more appealing sites to display their merchandise, and many of the younger members were not eager to be a part of the work crews. At first, adjust-ments were made to accommodate new demands. But the lack of interest of younger boomers in taking over the workload struck the death knell. Within a couple of years, the antique show was just a memory.*

> *Of those who had been very involved in the event, some found new outlets at the church for their ministry, some limited their involvement to attending worship, while others just stopped coming to church. There was no formal recognition the end of the antique show tradition and the many people who had labored long and hard to make it work. It became a memory for fewer and fewer people as time went on.*

People over seventy-five bring the same values that defined them in the work-place and at home—loyalty, sacrifice for the common good, team players, strong work ethic—to their places of worship. Whether they are planning an annual antique show or raising funds for new buildings, they are committed to see a project to its end. While they don't demand recognition, they are disappointed when their efforts go unnoticed. Like the people who made the antique show at All Saints a success, this generation sees change as a negative force that undermines their past work.

Older adults usually prefer a more traditional worship experience, which has familiar rhythms and words that ground them at a time when everything else seems to be moving. They resist meaningless change, but they are willing to try new ideas for the sake of their grandchildren and younger generations.

They often provide a significant portion of financial support for mainline churches and continue to be a core of those willing to make annual pledges. Sta-tistically the age-based wealth gap is unprecedented ("The Rising Age Gap in Economic Well-Being," Pew Research). Older adults have made dramatic gains

relative to younger adults in their economic well-being during the past quarter century. In 1984, the age-based wealth gap between older people and people under thirty-five was 10:1. By 2009, it had ballooned to 47:1. Older people not only provide gifts of wisdom and mentoring to churches, they are also a stable funding source.

Religious and Spiritual Perspectives

Faith Development

The Center for the Ministry of Teaching (CMT) at Virginia [Episcopal] Theological Seminary has developed a "training of the trainers" workshop about spiritual well-being of older people. Because the center embraced the concept of lifelong formation, the staff had been looking at the availability of curricula and program resources targeted to people over seventy. There wasn't much to choose from.

The center decided to offer a daylong workshop for clergy and laity in churches, institutions, chaplaincies, and residence facilities titled "Spirituality after 70" and gathered research and planned programming. Not too long before the scheduled workshop, the organizers took a look at the people who registered. Every person who registered was over sixty-five, and only two worked part time in an aging-related profession. The center quickly retooled the workshop, added a hospice chaplain to the roster of presenters, and began saying "we" and "us" when referring to older people instead of "them." What was discovered in the ensuing years was a hunger for a relationship with God among the older people the center encountered, most of whom were longtime church members.

By the time active churchgoers reach seventy-five we assume they have a mature faith, as described by James Fowler, or an "owned faith," in the words of John Westerhoff. Faith is not a static concept, according to Fowler, but process of becoming. From his interviews with more than five hundred people of all ages, Fowler described this process as stages that are hierarchical, sequential, and invariant.

Faith journeys can move through six stages described by Fowler, although few progress through all of them and many complete only two or three. People may find true meaning in a particular stage and remain there for their entire lives, or they may move through several stages. John Westerhoff, whose theory of faith development was grounded in Fowler's work, described the relationship between different styles and stages of faith by using the analogy to a tree: "First, a tree with one ring is as much a tree as a tree with four rings. A tree in its first year is a complete and whole tree, and a tree with three rings is not a better tree but only an expanded tree. In a similar way, one style of faith is not a better or greater faith than another . . . hence to expand into new styles of faith, not so as to possess better or greater faith, but only to fulfill ones' faith potential" (Westerhoff, 89–90).

Fowler's research indicates that most church members are commonly found in stage 3, the *loyalist*. In this stage, agreement and conformity are very important. This would be consistent to the overall generational characteristics of people over seventy-five. Loyalists look for churches and other places of worship that share their faith identity and hold common beliefs. The strong sense of community among the loyalists encourages regular attendance and active involvement in the life of a particular church. Liturgical churches, including Catholic, Episcopalian, and Lutheran, support this kind of faith by emphasizing creeds, doctrines, and traditions that state the norms of a particular faith.

Faith for loyalists comes through agreement and harmony, while disagreements and challenges to authority are seen as an obstacle to faith. Westerhoff, who prefers the word style to stage, identifies people with this style of faith as *affiliative* faith. A characteristic of this style, which speaks to people over seventy-five, is the importance of a sense of authority. The church, says Westerhoff, must be consciously aware of its story and its direction. Knowing its traditions and learning the community's story, he notes, is of central importance. "Identity and authority go hand-in-hand," he says (95). Many older people believe that the church has lost its authority because its story has been altered dramatically. Their faith is in crisis because they no longer personally own the story that provides the foundation of the community's faith (96).

While Fowler saw his stage 3 as a progression to a wider expression of faith, for most it is the place that provides the deepest meaning of their spiritual lives. Perhaps the experience of losing friends, spouses, and other family members has further eroded the belief that the community provides faith and meaning. People who hunger for "spirituality after seventy" seem to be ready to find a new way to express their faith.

Older adults are also found in Fowler's next two stages, the *critic* and the *seer*. For adolescents and young adults, the critic stage is expressed through the questioning of faith and tradition, and sometimes results in the rejection of some assumptions. For people over seventy-five this stage is not much different. Sometimes people move into a time of doubt and questioning because of the death of a loved one or radical changes in their lives. Some in this stage have opted out of church because it was not a place where they could explore their doubt with others. When most of a congregation finds loyalty and agreement paramount to their faith, the doubter may not feel welcome. The questions raised by critics are uncomfortable, and for many, best left unasked.

Stage 4 is not a comfortable place to be. Fowler argues that it is essential, however, for people to move into mature faith (287). Without questions and doubt, faith ends up belonging to the group rather than the individual. Although the strength of a faith reflected in "we believe" statements in creeds and in life together is powerful, it is fed from the individual struggles of "I believe" convictions.

Westerhoff argues that a *searching* faith is necessary as people move from a faith that belongs to community to one that is their own. "At this point," he says, "the 'religion of the head' becomes equally important with the 'religion of the heart'" (97). For those over seventy-five, the doubt that comes out of a searching faith may seem at odds with our mental picture of life on a putting green and taking it easy. It may be the first time, however, that people have found time to reflect on losses and changes in their lives. The faith questions they have avoided in the busy-ness of their professional lives and personal pursuits may become unavoidable.

Another characteristic of this stage is experimentation, says Westerhoff, testing traditions by learning about the faith of others and reaching conviction that become their own. The result of searching their faith is commitment to both people and causes. Westerhoff notes that many adults have never been a part of churches that encouraged doubt and a searching faith (97). They are uncomfortable as they observe young adults enter a searching style of faith. While experimentation and renewed commitment may seem more applicable to younger people, those over seventy-five who have never explored this faith style may now be ready to take it on.

By the time people reach seventy-five, there seems to be an assumption that they have reached Fowler's stage 5, the *seer* stage. "Our faith" has become "my faith" (Stokes, 20), what Westerhoff calls *owned* faith. These people are able to see perspectives that differ from their own, and they identify with people of different races and cultures, socio-economic status, or ideologies. They are the models of wisdom for younger people and family members.

> *Bonnie, a widow who just turned eighty-five, stays busier than people half her age. Her works are grounded in her faith, which allow her to focus on giving rather than taking. Every August she organizes, publicizes, recruits volunteers and health care professionals, and operates a one-day clinic that provides physicals for local children entering public schools. Most are immigrants who speak a cacophony of languages from Spanish to Urdu to Japanese. Bonnie also taps her friends to help her purchase and fill backpacks for every child served.*

> *The annual clinic is just one of many activities in her life. Until recently she was responsible for coordinating all funeral receptions for her large, urban church. She is an active Rotarian, attending monthly meetings and supporting the organization's philanthropy projects. She is quiet but firm in her expectations for herself and others. God has been her refuge through difficult seasons when questions were more numerous than answers. Her pilgrimage is marked by a faith that abides in both word and deed.*

Bonnie has, in Westerhoff's words, eliminated "any dissonance between [her] faith as stated in [her] beliefs and [her] actions in the world" (98). He notes that

seers, or people of owned faith, look for and need the support of others in doing good works and putting their faith to work. Bonnie's gift to her friends is asking them to join her in tasks that go far beyond their comfort zones.

The most important lesson we learn in school is discovering how much we don't know. The same applies to people in Fowler's stage 5 or Westerhoff's owned faith style: as their faith becomes their own, they become aware that new and challenging opportunities for spiritual growth can continuously increase the potential of faith in their lives.

Somehow the church thinks that congregants over seventy-five have magically jumped from the community stage—where they have spent most of their lives—into a deeper faith that is clearly their own. Many religious groups, says Fowler, "reinforce a conventionally held and maintained faith system, sanctifying one's remaining in the dependence on external authority and derivative group identity of Stage 3" (178). Churches do the same thing, often with clichés and trite aphorisms. When a person enters the final stages of life, this kind of faith system may or may not provide the reinforcement needed for the difficult journey ahead.

Religiosity and Faith Practices

There are two ways, Lyon suggests, to understand religiosity or faith and spirituality among older people: the first is through human science studies of the extent, functions, and direction of spirituality or religious beliefs and practices of this group; the second is through theological or philosophical studies of the meaning of this time of life from the perspective of a particular faith tradition (Lyon, 281). There are strengths and weaknesses of both kinds of inquiry. Studies coming out of the social sciences often explore the human importance of religion or spirituality as people age. The second kind of inquiry looks for meaning from the symbols, images, and beliefs that resonate with older people of a specific faith community.

The first perspective, which comes from social scientists, indicates that religious belief tends to remain fairly stable throughout adulthood. Even if active involvement declines because of poor health or other reasons, religious belief does not change radically from younger years (Lyon, 281). A Gallup poll from 2010 shows that 53 percent of Americans over sixty-five attend church weekly or almost once a week (Americans' Church Attendance Inches Up in 2010). Lyon would argue that people in their seventies and eighties are likely to attend church with as much regularity as they had in the past. Involvement may not decline, but at the same time, probably won't increase, either. "People do not tend to 'turn to religion' with aging. . . If someone hasn't been religious in younger years, it is unlikely they will become religious in late adulthood" (281).

Despite claims that religious practices and beliefs increase the emotional and physical well-being of older people, Lyon argues that the results are mixed. Some practices might increase well-being, but others are detrimental. That does not

mean that individuals won't find solace and strength in religion. Another trend that follows previous patterns for older people is the greater involvement in church activities of women. Women are more likely to find meaning and strength from their faith than older men (281).

Although we often use the words *religion* and *spirituality* interchangeably in talking about the second kind of inquiry, there are distinct differences between the two from the perspective of social science and theorists such as Lawrence Kohlberg, noted for his work in moral development theory, and Lars Tornstam, in gerotranscendence. Kohlberg describes an additional stage 7 in his construct of moral development, which is unique to older people. It is not a higher level of moral thinking, but a cosmic perspective coming from religious questions that structure moral thinking. It comes from the questions that arise from the nearness of death about the meaning of life and how people want to die. Kohlberg's new stage is related to Erik and Joan Erikson's theory about late adulthood, which is a result, at least in part, of a longer life span (497–502). Tornstam's studies of gerotranscendence are similarly connected. (See earlier discussion.)

The questions that arise from what Kohlberg calls a *cosmic perspective* are similar to the ones religious communities have always wrestled with. In Christian traditions, notes Lyon, four claims define the spirituality of aging:

> First, God remains with older adults in the same way God is with us throughout lives: as One who blesses, justifies, and redeems. . . . We need not be crushed under the weight of the shortcomings of our past; second, later adulthood is a period not only of loss but also of possibilities for growth in faith. . . . This does not diminish or minimize the reality of loss itself, but rather suggests that loss is not all there is; third, older adults are specially called in this regard to serve as teachers and witnesses of faith to younger generation; [and] fourth, the experience of old age has been seen as contextualized by belief in the resurrection . . . our death is not the final thing about us. God redeems our lives from final meaninglessness (283–84)

We are all on the same journey with the same destination. And as Joan Erikson reminds us, "From the beginning we are blessed with basic trust" (1998, 113). She goes on to say that life without hope is impossible, and with it we not only endure, but gain strength. "Whatever the specific sources of our basic trust may be or have been, and no matter how severely hope has been challenged, it has never abandoned us completely." Hope gives us, she says, "reason for living" (1998, 113–14). For Christians, hope is expressed both in the resurrection and in trusting a God who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod 34:6).

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developing ||||||||||||||||||

faith formation

|||||||||||| **for the seasons of adulthood**

Spiritual Transformation in Adult Faith Formation

TOM ZANZIG

One major mistake when working with adult faith formation is to focus far more on the transmission of content than on the transformation of persons. Adult programming too often *starts* with a given body of content and inevitably moves toward such academic and educational issues as curriculum design, formats and schedules, methodologies, and content delivery systems. Because the starting point is content and, to a lesser degree, methodology, references or connections to the actual lived experience of the adults being served get short shrift or lost altogether. Two major factors in the failure of most adult faith formation efforts are 1) choice of starting points (content over persons) and 2) preferred methods—education of the head rather than the spiritual formation of the total person.

I advocate a radically different adult faith formation approach that I call *community-based spiritual transformation*. Ministry among adults will succeed only if starts and

stays with their lived experience of the spiritual journey and uses strategies and techniques that help people name, reflect upon, and share with trusted others their lives as disciples of Jesus.

This chapter summarizes the foundational principles and components of the model I have developed and answers the common questions posed in many of my workshops and conversations: What will that mean in terms of our actual programming? What does a "spiritual transformation model" of adult faith formation look like in the real world? How can we implement the model in a congregation or church? These are legitimate and important questions.

Core Values and Pastoral Principles

Sound planning, according to Stephen Covey, "starts with the end in mind." Below are the values, attitudes, and pastoral principles a congregation will embrace to minister effectively to and with those adults who are ready to grow as disciples. I present them as a covenant between pastoral leaders and the "engaged adults" of the community.

As pastoral leaders we will:

- Embrace the gift and responsibility of being a *particular* community of faith, uniquely called and sustained by the Spirit of God at this time and in this place.
- Remember that we nurture and support one another not for personal growth alone but to fulfill the mission given the church by Jesus—to call forth and form genuine disciples who make real the reign of God through evangelizing lives and loving service.
- Recognize and respect that each member of the faith community is engaged in a lifelong journey of faith and spiritual formation that is neither limited to nor solely dependent on church life. The congregation is called to serve, nurture, and minister to the adults' unique journeys according to their needs—which at times may be minimal or even lead them outside the community.
- Challenge and equip adult members to assume personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth and participation in the church's mission with the assistance and support as needed of the community. (Adopt the motto of Home Depot: "You can do it, we can help.")
- Focus not on developing new *programs* but rather on developing new *patterns of living* as a community of faith—ways of interacting, dreaming, creating, reconciling, worshipping and working together—as we establish *systems* of shared responsibility.

- Avoid preempting the work of the Spirit by prematurely naming our goals, expected outcomes, or preferred future. We will remain open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit and resist the constant temptations toward power and control.
- Build on our community's life-giving history and invite members to share their God-given strengths and talent; we will live as if we actually believe the good news that the Spirit is working in and through *this* community of disciples right *now*!
- Accept that the primary responsibility of the congregation, and its most essential and effective ministry, is to offer rich and vibrant worship, without which genuine formation is impeded if not impossible. We acknowledge that everything in church life flows from or builds on good liturgy. We also accept that a rich liturgical life may well satisfy the felt needs of a majority of adult members.
- Build the faith community "from the inside out," not from the top down. We will listen, discern, dream, plan, and minister *collaboratively*, i.e., as a genuine community of disciples with a shared mission.
- Provide a warm, welcoming, and evangelizing environment for all members, while focusing our energies and resources on those members who wish to actively pursue their growth as disciples.
- Call engaged adults to a covenantal relationship with their God, the community, and the world, a covenant they express through carefully discerned personal spiritual practices, communal connections, and Christian service.
- Use available and emerging technologies to enhance and unleash the creative energies of the community and of its individual members.

Not a Program but a Pastoral Process

To move toward a spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation, I propose that a congregation engage in a thoughtful, prayerful, and patient three- to five-year pastoral process (which might then be repeated as needed) in which *the process is the program*. We do not commit to interminable planning and meeting and building for some future goal. Rather, the way we proceed, the relationships we build, the tools we use, the talents and gifts we uncover and unleash—all are part of the patterns and systems that will anchor and sustain us *whatever emerges from our efforts through the grace of God*. In ministering to the spiritual formation of adults, we will not prematurely identify our goals and then set out to "achieve" them. Such approaches may work for fundraising and building projects, but not for genuine "soul work." We don't know what our community will look like at the "end" of this process because there is no end. Our task and commitment is to remain faithful and open *now* to what the Spirit is creating among and through us.

This pastoral process utilizes strategies and tools that reflect the core values and pastoral principles described above. Leaders can mix and match and sequence these in ways that fit their community's current situation and needs. Again: This is *not* a "program." Rather, the suggested tools and strategies reflect and help *create* the patterns and systems that are at the heart of an adult faith formation vision. *How* a congregation chooses to use these strategies and, more importantly, the results of their use will be unique for each congregation, because each community of faith is unique. The intent of this process is to discern, lift up, celebrate, and unleash the creative talents and gifts of *these* members in *this* place and time—all in service to the reign of God. What emerges from the process may well surprise us.

A Model of Spiritual Growth

If the heart of effective adult faith formation is spiritual transformation, those engaged in the process can name, reflect on, and comfortably share stories about and lessons learned from their spiritual life. Therefore, undergirding the community-based spiritual transformation model of adult faith formation is a theologically grounded but also accessible understanding of the spiritual life and the dynamics of lifelong spiritual transformation.

For two decades I have been working on a model of transformation that would not only help me make sense of my journey but also help others understand and embrace their own life experience. In an age of increasing secularization and the dramatic increase in the not religious affiliated, I wanted to find a way to think about and interpret common life experience through the lens of Christian faith but absent the kind of religious presumptions and jargon that increasingly seem foreign, if not off-putting, to many people. What has evolved from that work is a way of understanding spirituality and religion that has been not only personally liberating but also enthusiastically embraced by those I've shared it with in presentations, workshops, and retreats.

Significantly the model is universal; its basic components and principles connect to persons regardless of their age, culture or ethnicity, or religious persuasion. Even atheists and unchurched people have said the model helps them name and reflect more deeply on their lived experience.

Following are visual summaries of three core elements of my theory of spiritual formation. (More information about this model of spiritual growth, go to: http://www.tomzanzig.com.)

The **Spiritual Growth Cycle** offers an alternative to the common understanding of the spiritual life as a predictable, even programmable, linear process, an understanding that inevitably leads to misconceptions about our spiritual journey, the nature of God, and the meaning of life. Deceptively simple at first glance, the Spiritual Growth Cycle gives a conceptual framework or roadmap for deepening study, personal reflection, and prayer.

Spiritual Growth Cycle
The Heart of the Matter

Hunger

Search

Awakening

Response

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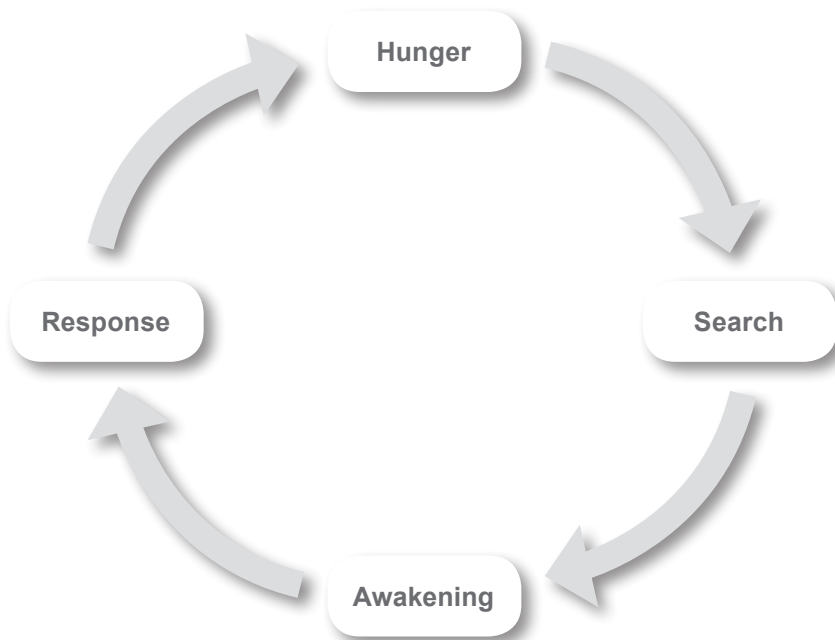
The **Spirituality Wheel** suggests that the cyclic growth process unfolds within multiple dimensions of life and over time leads to our deepening integration as persons.

Spirituality Wheel

© 2009 Tom Zanzig
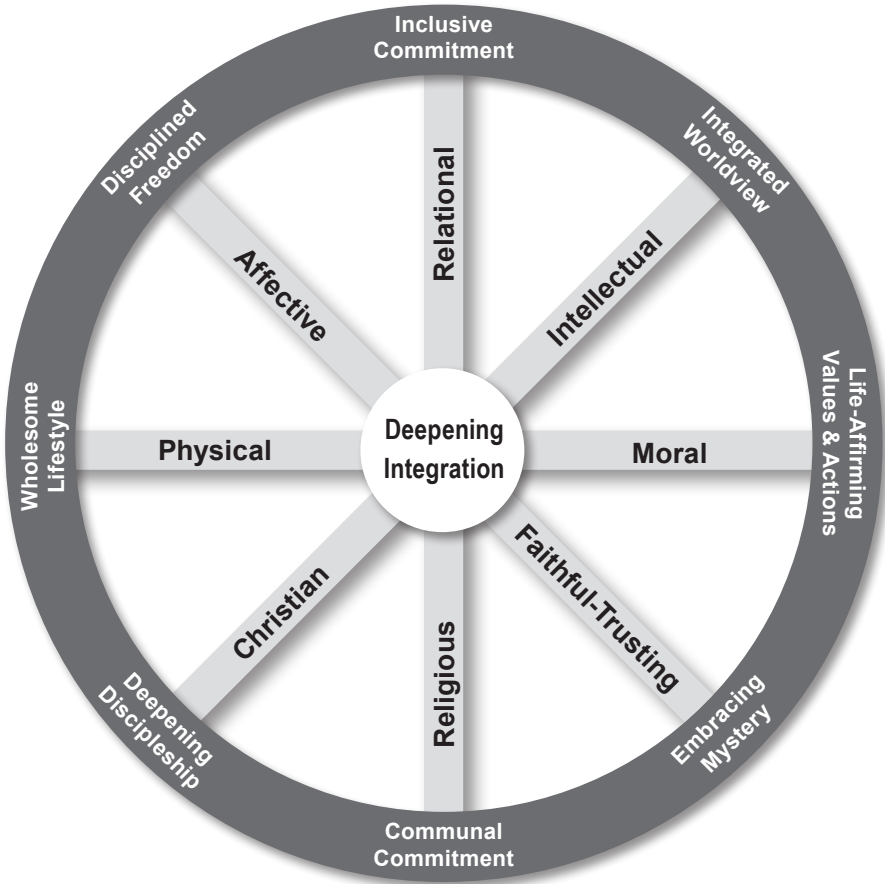
The **Personal Discernment Tool** provides a method for exploring life experiences within the framework of the Spiritual Growth Cycle.

Personal Discernment Tool

Note: This is a generic version of a tool that can be adapted for use with each dimension. It can also be used to reflect on and explore any event, situation, or personal issue within the context of spirituality.

• Within this dimension, what is your deepest hunger, what do you yearn for right now?

• Has that hunger changed recently? In what way? Why?

• What might stand in the way of your embracing the gifts of this experience? What might help?

• How might your response affect or change the hungers of your heart?

Hunger

Response

Search

Awakening

• List three ways you might search to satisfy the hunger(s) you've identified.

• Of those options, which might lead to the most life-giving, healthful results?

• Though we can't program our awakenings, what lessons or insights might this experience hold for you?

• How might you prepare to receive those gifts?

Appreciative Inquiry

Dr. Jane Regan of Boston College sums up effective adult learning with the rich and insightful observation that adults learn best when they gather in conversation around things that matter. Every phrase of that statement is important. Many of the tools and strategies I advocate have deep conversation as their goal. Other strategies, like the components of my spiritual growth model, help adults reflect on and interpret their life experience so they have something to bring to the table (often literally) when they gather with others.

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organizational change that offers powerful techniques for gathering adults in meaningful conversation. Most approaches to organizational change focus on naming problem areas, identifying root causes for the problems, then planning and implementing steps for eliminating or reducing the impact of those root causes. Because of their constant attention to problem areas, however, such approaches often drain energy and suck the life out of organizations and their leaders. By the time the problem is "solved" (it seldom is) no one really cares anymore. Yet most organizations repeat the same ineffective process over and over.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is an approach to organizational change that focuses on and builds upon *positive, life-giving* experiences. Through directed interviews and other conversational strategies, AI surfaces activities, attitudes, experiences, and so on that give people hope and fuel a desire for deeper commitment to and engagement in the organization. The organization then seeks ways to enhance, replicate, or expand upon those positive and energizing realties.
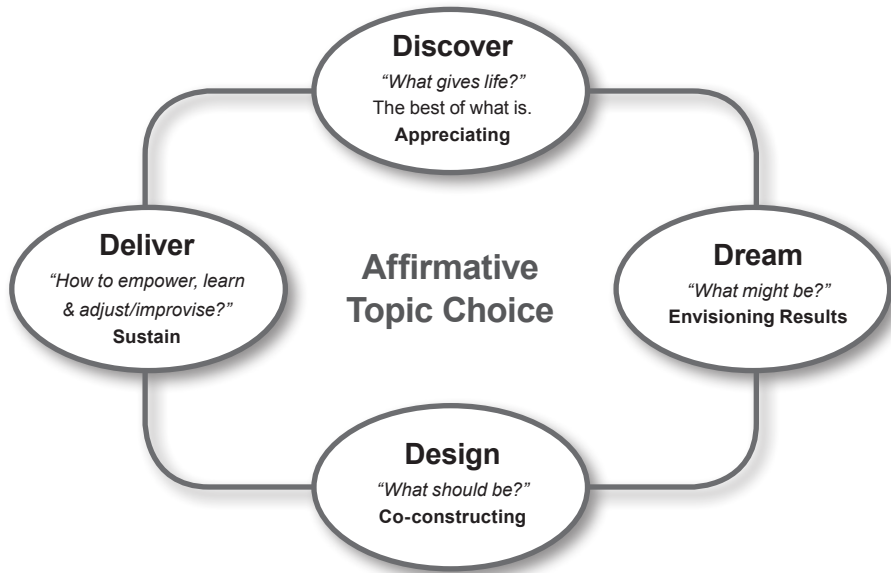
A brief introduction to AI is available in *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond. A more thorough but still accessible presentation of AI is *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, two pioneers in the management field. You might also look at the wealth of resources available on this appreciative inquiry website: http://appreciative inquiry.case.edu.

The structured processes and practical strategies of appreciative inquiry can be used in multiple ways in adult faith formation and other programming. One particularly effective AI strategy in helping an organization grow and change quickly is the "AI summit." When used by corporations, universities, and other institutions, the summit can take as many as four days and result in detailed long-range planning. A more realistic and workable approach for congregations is to create one or more AI processes that can be implemented in one day (think "town hall meeting") or in a series of shorter sessions. A summit can focus energy on two key elements of my transformation model of adult faith formation: rich conversation about things that matter by adults who gather together in a supportive and faith-filled community. In such a setting, the Spirit can work wonders!

Use AI strategies to identify and then build on those elements of church life that have demonstrably and reliably lifted the hearts and sustained the faith of the members. The starting point is a deep listening to and purposeful conversation about

things that matter to *these* disciples at *this* time. Over time the operating principles of the AI approach can become standard practice for church leaders, standing committees, and so on.

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

Discover
"What gives life?"
The best of what is.
Appreciating

Deliver
"How to empower, learn & adjust/improvise?"
Sustain

Affirmative Topic Choice

Dream
"What might be?"
Envisioning Results

Design
"What should be?"
Co-constructing

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Gallup's StrengthsFinder and Engagement Resources

The Gallup Organization has conducted extensive research and developed and thoroughly tested tools for helping individuals identify their personal strengths and then helping organizations and institutions fully utilize and nurture those strengths—for the great benefit of both individuals and institutions. Initially their work focused on the corporate world. In recent years Gallup has applied the fruits of that work to churches and other religious organizations. The connections between the Gallup work and my adult faith formation vision are potentially profound.

Gallup has developed resources in two independent but related areas: *Living Your Strengths* and *StrengthFinder 2.0.* These resources utilize an online, self-guided inventory to help individuals identify their dominant talents and name ways that they can "play to their strengths" in their relationships, career, family life, and now church. Gallup has identified thirty-four personal themes or potential strengths. The online inventory guides a user to identify his or her top five gifts—God-given

potentials that together give one the capacity to not only make a difference in the world but also deepen one's sense of personal value, well-being, and happiness. Like the AI philosophy, this tool helps persons focus on the positive and life-giving aspects of their personality and life experience. Simply taking the "test" is a highly affirming and empowering experience.

The book *Growing an Engaged Congregation* by Gallup is subtitled "How to Stop 'Doing Church' and Start Being the Church Again." This is not a program but an exploration based on solid research of what leads some people to be fully connected and committed to their congregations. Gallup uses the term *engagement* to name that connection, claiming it is possible to accurately measure levels of engagement in a faith community and then implement practical strategies to increase those measures over time, resulting in even dramatic growth in congregational vitality. Especially when linked to the insights of the *StrengthFinder* instrument, the engaged congregation research offers another practical tool for the "how to" dimension of adult faith formation. Contracting with Gallup to lead the processes in a congregation can be expensive but simply reading the book and then adapting the material can be fruitful.

Both strengths-based and engagement resources include two elements that are central to all effective adult faith formation: personal reflection and conversation (at least when using small groups with the strengths resources). Many congregations have used strengths-based tools and resources to help members identify their gifts and discern ways to share those with the community. In some cases the strengths approach has transformed approaches to stewardship and led to dramatic increases in volunteer leadership and program participation. For formation purposes, the strengths resources provide effective tools for making the work of spiritual discernment real and concrete.

One-Minute Meditation

Over the last decade I have discovered and refined a simple prayer method that has nourished my own spiritual life and been embraced and practiced by those with whom I've shared it. Grounded in the conviction that our spiritual lives, like all our relationships, unfold and deepen literally one minute at a time, I call the practice "one-minute meditation" and the theological principle behind it "one-minute *metanoia*." I now incorporate both concepts as foundational elements of my adult faith formation vision and practice.

I initially developed one-minute meditation as a personal prayer practice and evolved practical techniques for incorporating it into my daily life. A few years ago I proposed to my pastor that we offer it as a personal and communal Lenten practice. The response was so positive that it has become a recurring feature of church life. I now incorporate one-minute meditation in my workshops and retreats, and many churches have used it with great success. For more information go to http://www.tomzanzig.com.

Self–Directed Small Groups

Parker Palmer has been one of my personal sources of light and hope. I have been particularly influenced by his book *A Hidden Wholeness: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*. Palmer combines profound insights into the nature of personal spirituality with a challenging method (what he calls circles of trust) for small groups to follow in nurturing one another's spiritual lives. When I first read the book it deeply connected with my own spiritual hungers and led me to initiate a small "circle" with two friends, which continues to nourish and sustain me.

In the last two decades or so, effective adult faith formation approaches include some version of small groups. Gallup's research supports that view (*Growing an Engaged Congregation,* chapter 8). The *concept* of small groups is clearly on target—they offer a powerful opportunity for nurturing the core value of spiritual companionship. But many small group approaches ultimately fail, sometimes because the groups are just another venue for delivering prepackaged content using methods out of touch with the real needs of those gathered. The paradigms haven't changed, only delivery systems. And good people seeking genuine growth often walk away disappointed.

Small groups need to be self-generated, self-directed, and self-sustained. That is, they cannot require the care and direction of a professional minister—in part, because there simply are not enough leaders to take on that task and, second, there can be no "one size fits all" approach to small groups.

Personal and Communal Spiritual Disciplines and Practices

Many older Catholics and Protestants remember a time when their religious identity was virtually defined by personal and communal practices that, for some, became lifelong spiritual disciplines. We could all name our favorite (or, for some, least favorite) personal devotions, family rituals, seasonal celebrations, and so on. In response to a variety of cultural and ecclesial changes and influences, many of those religious identifiers have been diminished or lost altogether—to the relief of some and the consternation of others.

In the last decade, however, spiritual disciplines and practices have made a stunning comeback, but in ways that are for the most part more healthy, mature, and more deeply integrated into a balanced understanding of holistic spirituality. Classic books like Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* continue to sell, along with more recent popular offerings like *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People* edited by Dorothy Bass. A website that is almost overwhelming in the scope of its resources is *Spirituality & Practice: Resources for Spiritual Journeys* (http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com).
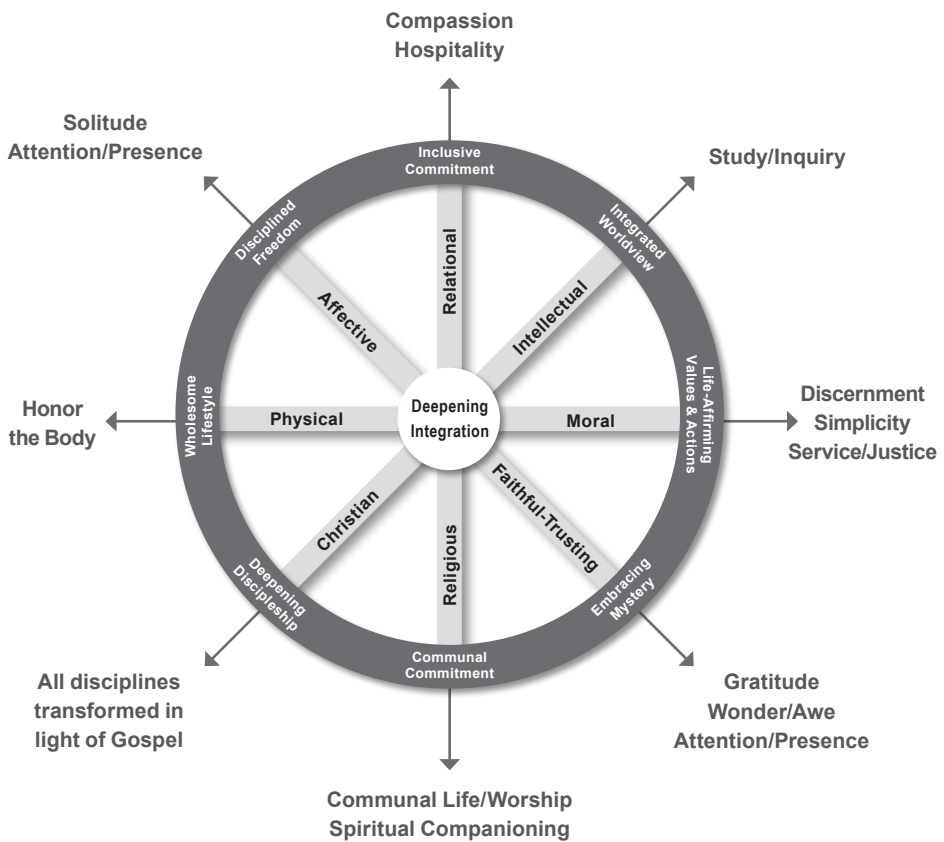
As I use the terms, *disciplines* are universal spiritual capacities, attitudes, "habits of the heart," while *practices* are exercises, routines, and training methods that help us grow, expand, and deepen the disciplines. Practices change and evolve; disciplines grow and deepen.

I encourage faith communities to introduce and integrate spiritual disciplines and practices as a regular and ongoing element of congregational life. I have identified twelve spiritual disciplines: compassion, hospitality, community/companions, gratitude/joy/hope, attention/presence, service/justice, simplicity, discernment, study/inquiry, honor the body, solitude, and wonder/awe.

Disciplines	Practices
Compassion	Listening, forgiveness, healing of memories
Hospitality	Openness to "the other," welcoming the stranger, creating a welcoming attitude and space
Community/ Companions	Tending family as core community; communal worship (for Christians, Eucharist at the center); nurturing spiritual friendships; seeking solidarity and unity with all; actively participating in local, national, and global communities
Gratitude/Joy/Hope	Developing a posture of "all is grace," nurturing a hopeful heart, attending to feelings of hopelessness, "clear a decent shelter for your sorrow" and grief (Hillesum) and joyful hope will follow
Attention/Presence	Living the "sacrament of the present moment," living the now and resisting the pull to past and future, "practice the presence of God" (Br. Lawrence) and the "Little Way" (Therese of Lisieux)
Service/Justice	Developing a generosity of spirit and capacity to live/give unconditionally, seeking gifts from those served
Simplicity	Resisting consumerism and materialism, readily sharing and avoiding possessiveness, cleansing life of distraction, practicing self-awareness in terms of personal and family finances
Discernment	Honing the skill of "reading the Spirit," pursuing life-affirming core values and attitudes, engaging community when needed, e.g., through "clearness committee" (Quaker practice)
Study/Inquiry	Nurturing insatiable curiosity and "learn to live the questions" (Rilke), resisting easy answers and certitude, studying prayerfully, and embracing the truth wherever it is found
Honor the body	Developing a healthy lifestyle, respecting and caring for the body through diet (including fasting) and exercise, respecting self and others physically and sexually, accepting and learning from physical limitations and inevitable death
Solitude	Developing a capacity for and comfort with silence, avoiding clinging and codependency, monitoring use of media and technology
Wonder/Awe	Embracing and celebrating mystery at the heart of all that is, approaching nature reverentially

The following diagram links the Twelve Disciplines to the Spirituality Wheel to show how the disciplines can support growth within each dimension of the spiritual life. A congregation might introduce, promote, and practice in various settings and through various means one spiritual discipline every few months on a recurring cycle. Over time, some disciplines might emerge as defining characteristics or features of congregational life.

The Spirituality Wheel & the Twelve Disciplines

Compassion
Hospitality

Solitude
Attention/Presence

Study/Inquiry

Inclusive
Commitment

Disciplined
Freedom

Integrated
Worldview

Relational

Affective

Intellectual

Honor
the Body

Wholesome
Lifestyle

Physical

Deepening
Integration

Moral

Life-Affirming
Values & Actions

Discernment
Simplicity
Service/Justice

Christian

Religious

Faithful-Trusting

Deepening
Discipleship

Embracing
Mystery

All disciplines
transformed in
light of Gospel

Communal
Commitment

Gratitude
Wonder/Awe
Attention/Presence

Communal Life/Worship
Spiritual Companioning

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Personal Covenant and Annual Examen

In this strategy, engaged members of the congregation are invited each year to create a personal spiritual covenant, i.e. a personal plan for growing spiritually during the coming year. They are asked to make commitments in three areas:

1. a personal spiritual practice (perhaps one-minute meditation)

2. a communal connection (perhaps participation in a "circle")

3. a way of service (within and/or outside the congregation)

The covenant might be connected to small group work, would be confidential (though perhaps developed with a trusted companion or spiritual advisor), and could involve a ritual of some kind (e.g. the presentation of the covenant statement as part of a worship experience).

Further, the covenant could be *initiated* on the anniversary of one's baptism as a way to recall and recommit to that seminal event. And one might be invited to mark the *conclusion* of the annual covenant with a formal examen—perhaps with the help of a spiritual advisor or companion, on the anniversary of one's baptism.

Web Resources: Current and Future Possibilities

A final ingredient in my adult faith formation "recipe" is actually a wide-ranging and growing collection of tools and strategies. The last of my core adult faith formation pastoral principles is the conviction that we have to better use available and emerging technologies to serve the purposes of adult faith formation—and in most other ministries in the church. Many web-based services related to both the communal and individual dimensions of the adult faith formation vision and practice are already available.

Communally, congregations can use web technologies and services to:

•   disseminate information about all of the adult faith formation principles and practices described in this chapter
•   facilitate communication from and among pastoral leaders and community members
•   reach out to disengaged members for the purposes of welcoming and evangelization
•   deliver program content
•   enhance other congregational ministries—learning, worship, service, and so forth

Personally or individually, web-based services can help each disciple:

- access reliable sources of spiritual and theological information
- develop personal prayer practices and modes of study
- link with people of similar interests and needs
- assess, plan, and track personal spiritual growth

So rich are the online possibilities for enhancing spiritual growth, and so rapidly are they expanding, that a church or congregation would be wise to develop a team whose primary task is to search the web for possibilities, evaluate and discern their usefulness for community members, and then disseminate information about those they deem helpful. Seekers today need trusted guides and "content curators" to help navigate the web, leaders who can help them separate the spiritual wheat from the chaff.

Turning the Dream into Reality

Each congregation will mix and match the above strategies in unique ways. Following is an example of one way a congregation might implement this model of adult faith formation. As presented, the approach suggests *sequential* steps, but many strategies can overlap, shortening the plan.

Year 1: Prepare the Community

1. Raise awareness of the need for ongoing renewal of the church, its mission, life, and practices.

2. Create a sense of urgency but also excitement and hope. One tactic: the pastor's call to arms—publicly naming and embracing new challenges.

3. Consider a sabbatical year focused on the spiritual life of the parish: meet with leaders and committees to assess and plan how that might play out.

4. Emphasize that the primary focus during the sabbatical is the conscientious and intentional celebration of the liturgy and sacraments.

5. Introduce one-minute meditation as a personal and communal practice.

Year 2: Use the Appreciative Inquiry Process

1. Remember: the process *is* the "program." AI doesn't just *result* in change; the process itself is transformative.

2. Pay close attention to your AI "affirmative topic choice," clearly defining your focus. (I presume a focus on nurturing the spiritual life of adults and better equipping them to assume personal responsibility for it.)

3. Consider linking the AI process to the liturgical year, e.g., starting in Advent and scheduling a closing AI summit during Lent.

4. Commit to establishing an "appreciative culture" within the church.

5. Evaluate your use of the web for communication and leadership purposes.

6. Consider introducing spiritual disciplines and practices on a thought-ful schedule: focus on a new one every three months through bulletin announcements and essays, pulpit references, integration into parish meet-ings and events, personal and small group commitments, and so forth. On that schedule, all twelve disciplines would be treated every three years.

Year 3: Introduce Foundational Elements of the Spiritual Discernment Model

The AI process, when used with integrity, should dictate next steps. But for the purposes of this example, I suggest strategies proposed in my model.

1. Identify "engaged" members who are willing to consciously enter into the next phase—a serious commitment to learn and employ the tools and prac-tices of personal spiritual discernment.

2. Offer resources, retreats, and workshops using the Spiritual Growth Cycle, Spirituality Wheel, and Discernment Tool.

3. Introduce, promote, and initiate the strategies of (1) spiritual companions and (2) self-organized and self-directed small groups.

4. Invite adults to try the annual examen as a helpful spiritual practice.

5. Consider training select leaders as spiritual companions.

6. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Year 4: Offer StrengthsFinder Inventory and Related Strategies

1. Introduce and promote the Strengths concept and resources to the entire congregation as a way to lift up and celebrate the gift of each member.

2. Invite engaged (and possibly trained) members (see year 3) to assume particular leadership roles in the church-wide implementation of Strengths.

3. Consider linking Strengths to other small group opportunities, e.g., the small groups initiated in year 3 might consider using StrengthsFinder (or *Living Your Strengths*) for exploring personal gifts and calls to service.

4. Invite the pastoral team and other leaders to use *Strengths-Based Leadership* by Thomas Rath and Barry Conchie.

5. Expand and deepen your use of technology, especially web-based services and resources related to spirituality.

6. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Year 5: Conduct Gallup's "Engagement" Assessment Process and Follow-Up

It may seem logical to employ this strategy earlier in the plan, allowing congregations to then use engagement concepts and tools to better monitor the effectiveness of all the other strategies. However, the formal and full-blown engagement process involves paying Gallup to conduct and guide the research. Many may find that prohibitive. Delaying the use of this strategy allows interested churches time to raise the financial resources required. A second reason for delaying use of the engagement resources is to expand the base of already engaged and, perhaps, trained leaders equipped to respond to and build upon what is learned through the assessment process.

1. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

2. Evaluate whether to repeat AI process, perhaps in modified form.

3. Continue introducing spiritual disciplines and practices.

Subsequent Years: Expand and Go Deeper

None of the strategies proposed in this plan are expected to be single use, "one and done" strategies. The goal is to create an *appreciative, spiritual transformation culture* reflecting the characteristics summarized in my proposed covenant. Building on the cyclic image of the Spiritual Growth Cycle, imagine this process as a spiral in which all these strategies combine to lead the church, as well as its individual members, deeper and deeper into the ongoing process of transformation.

Closing Comments

I have proposed that the adult faith formation process outlined in this chapter might unfold slowly over a three- to five-year period and then be repeated as needed. For example, one might plan on repeating the appreciative inquiry "town hall meeting" every three years or so as a way to surface the wisdom of new members (or the new wisdom of old members!) and identify changing circumstances that might prompt new pastoral responses.

Some elements of the process would hopefully become routine and ongoing dimensions of church life. For example, a congregation might invite every new member to use the online StrengthFinder inventory to identify their talents before committing to any particular involvement in the church. The immediate and concrete message to the new member would be, "We know you bring unique gifts to this community. We want you to name those talents first for your own growth and happiness. Then, as the Spirit moves you, we invite you to share them with the rest of us." How do you think a new member would respond to such affirmation and hospitality?

Or perhaps a congregation will choose to make the one-minute meditation a common practice for all official functions—meetings, religious education classes, special events, and so on.

Finally, I do not mean to suggest that adult faith formation can be accomplished without any formal, structured programs. In fact, a desire for and openness to various kinds of programming might well emerge *from* the process. But programs will be selected and then retained only if they truly serve *these* adults in *this* place and time. Programs will come and go, and we won't expect them to accomplish more than they can. The people, not the programs, are sacred.

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Developing Adult Faith Formation Programming

JOHN ROBERTO

▋▋▋▋▋ The *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* advocates for a vision and practices that lead to the development of a comprehensive, adult faith formation plan for the congregation that:

- Focuses on the process of growing in faith and discipleship using the eight faith-forming processes as a framework for designing adult faith formation.
- Provides developmentally- and generationally-appropriate knowledge and practices for each season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.
- Engages adults intergenerationally in the life and events of the Christian community.
- is developed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources with a wide variety of engaging and interactive programs and experiences in physical places (church, home, community, world) and online spaces (website and social media platforms).

This chapter presents ten guides for developing adult faith formation programming that reflect current research and practice in adult learning and the key features of twenty-first century faith formation presented in chapter 1. These ten guides serve as a foundation for designing adult faith formation programs, activities, and resources in physical and online spaces:

1. Focus on the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood.

2. Target the spiritual and religious diversity of adults.

3. Offer a wide variety of programming to address the diversity of adults' lives.

4. Use multiple environments for programming.

5. Enhance participation in programming by building on adult motivation and principles for effective adult learning.

6. Design online and digitally enabled strategies into all programming.

7. Develop programming around the essential eight faith-forming processes.

8. Incorporate intergenerational programming into adult faith formation.

9. Address the needs of families in each season of adulthood.

10. Design missional initiatives to reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.

Chapter 9 presents a planning process for designing adult faith formation for one or more seasons of adulthood. Find additional information and resources online for developing adult faith formation (case studies, articles, strategies, links to online resources, and more) at www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

Guide 1

Focus on the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood.

One of the key features of twenty-first century adult faith formation is addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys at each stage of adulthood: young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+). Programs, activities, and resources need to be *targeted* and *tailored* to the lives of adults. Adult faith formation is person-centered, not content- or program-centered. The content, experiences, programs, methods, and delivery systems are designed around the lives of the adults. While

this may sound self-evident, it is not. So much of adult faith formation is developed from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determine the content and programming and deliver it to adults. In the twentieth-first century, the diversity of adulthood makes this approach ineffective.

Drawn from the research and perspectives in chapters 3–6, here are key characteristics and needs of each adult stage that can serve as a foundation for developing targeted and tailored approaches, programs, and strategies for faith formation. These will be especially helpful in designing adult faith formation using the process in chapter 9.

Key Characteristics of Young Adults

1. Young adults are exploring their identity: trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work, developing an individual sense of autonomy, and stabilizing a self-concept and body image.

2. Young adults are "tinkering"—putting together a life from the skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand.

3. Young adults are developing and maintaining intimate relationships with trust, love, and caring.

4. Young adults are transitioning from their family of origin toward establishing independence in living arrangement, finances, career, and other aspects of their lives.

5. Young adults are differentiating self without repudiating or replacing their family of origin—sorting out emotionally what they take from their family of origin, what they leave behind, and what they will create for themselves.

6. Young adults are developing a career and occupational identity and working to establish a work-life balance.

7. Young adults are adjusting to the expectations and responsibilities of the "adult" world.

8. Young adults—many but not all—are committing to a marital partner, defining and learning the roles of married life.

9. Young adults—many but not all—are having children and becoming parents, establishing a new family with its own rules, roles, responsibilities, values, and traditions, and developing parenting roles and skills.

10. Young adults are engaged in a theological reevaluation and reinvention—regardless of their affiliation or involvement with actual religious institutions—synthesizing tacit beliefs (synthetic-conventional faith) and revising implicit beliefs in light of stepping out of their social system of origin (individuative-reflective faith).

Key Characteristics of Midlife Adults

1.   Midlife adults are continuing to seek a definition for self that is now focused on "Who am I with you?" Relationships take on deeper meaning and compel them to explore how the self is adjusted in the context of committed family, work, and civic relationships that have become so important at this stage of life. They are parents, colleagues, leaders, team members, and more.

2.   Midlife adults are anchoring themselves in a particular way of life filled with stable commitments and relationships.

3.   Midlife adults are focused on maintaining intimate relationships with other midlife adults while developing the capacity for new kinds of relationships with those younger and older than themselves. The midlife adult is involved in the generative task of caring and guiding the next generations (including children and grandchildren) and with caring for the older generation.

4.   Midlife adults are building extensive personal networks for themselves and their families—traditional networks around their families, coworkers, churches, and other organizations, supplemented by digital social networks that allow more frequent conversations. Midlife adults are striving for a healthy balance in their personal and social networks.

5.   Midlife adults are evaluating their lives at its midpoint and often growing beyond the pressures of the present moment toward an appreciation of the deeper meanings symbolized in religious tradition. Time for refreshment and reflection supports the active expression of generativity and care. Midlife adults are reflecting on "What are we spending and being spent for? What commands and receives our best time and energy? What causes, dreams, goals, or institutions are pouring out our life for? To what or whom are we committed in life and in death? What are our most sacred hopes, our most compelling goals, and purposes in life?"

6.   Midlife adults are engaged in family life and parenting children, adolescents, and, often, young adults. They are allowing for the increasing independence of adolescents while maintaining enough structure to foster continued family development. They are adjusting patterns of family communication, traditions, and celebrations for adolescent and young adult children. Many are adapting to an empty-nest household and redefining the marriage relationship and roles now that children are no longer at home full-time.

7.   Midlife adults are seeking a religion that emphasizes personal identity, religious experience, and a quest for religious identity in community. They want a religion emphasizing the sensual and experiential, combining the sacred and the profane, and incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs. They insist on an authentic religious experience that acknowledges the ambiguities, trials, and successes of life.

Key Characteristics of Mature Adults

1. Mature adults are addressing the challenge of generativity (or its failure, stagnation)—establishing and guiding the next generation, striving to create or nurture things that will outlast them through caring for others, and creating and accomplishing things that make the world a better place.

2. Mature adults approaching older adulthood are addressing the challenge of integrity—reflecting on the life they have lived and coming away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair.

3. Mature adults are experiencing physical changes and decline, coming to terms with the cognitive changes related to a changed perspective on time and a personal, existential awareness of death. They are seeking to stay physically and mentally fit.

4. Mature adults are thinking about, planning for, and disengaging from their primary career occupations, launching second or third careers, and developing new identities and new ways to be productively engaged.

5. Mature adults are retiring from full-time work and planning for sufficient income that will last into their later adult years.

6. Mature adults are blending (part-time) work, volunteering and civic engagement, pursuit of new interests, travel, and their role as grandparent into a new lifestyle for the mature adult years.

7. Mature adults are concerned about having adequate health care into later life and providing for their own or a spouse/partner's long-term care needs.

8. Mature adults are establishing new patterns of relating to spouses, children, siblings, parents, and friends, leaving some existing relationships and beginning new ones.

9. Mature adults are experiencing changes in the marital relationship now that parenting responsibilities are minimal, developing adult-to-adult relationships between grown children and their parents, becoming grandparents, realigning relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren. They are caring for the older generation and dealing with disabilities and death.

10. Mature adults are moving to the very core of their faith tradition, while appreciating other religious traditions. They are seeking a self-reflective quest for individual wholeness, a search for depth and meaning, as well as guidance for living one's life. They tend to recognize that spirituality must be cultivated through sustained practice. Spirituality will be a significant aspect of the remainder of their lives.

11. Mature adults seek to be in service to others that is mission driven and can make a difference. They want do to do things that give their lives purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. They want to know their contributions truly matter.

12. Mature adults seek spiritual growth in a time of significant life transitions and in a time when they are searching for meaning and purpose in life as they enter the second half of life and evaluating the things that really provide lasting fulfillment. They desire meaningful relationships where people can connect with one another and talk about spiritual and life issues.

13. Mature adults seek intergenerational relationships to share their lives, stories, and faith across generations, and to be united with the whole faith community.

Key Characteristics of Older Adults

1. Older adults are remaining vital and actively engaged in the lives of their community, church, social network, and family well into their eighties and nineties. Many are still involved in leadership roles at church and in the community.

2. Older adults are experiencing changes in their body and a decline in mental and physical ability, such as a loss of hearing or vision or dexterity. Some older adults experience varying degrees of dementia. For many older adults these mental and physical changes reduce their mobility resulting in isolation from others.

3. Older adults are continuing to learn and process new information, and many live well into their nineties with memory and logic intact.

4. Older adults are addressing the challenge of integrity—reflecting on the life they have lived and coming away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair. They are cultivating wisdom in which one's perspective on the world and human relationships reflect an inner sense of liberation from the rules, roles, and rituals of the past.

5. Older adults are taking on new roles as senior citizens and adjusting to the role of mentor and sage in their extended family.

6. Older adults are experiencing losses of friends and loved ones: death of a spouse, family members, and close friends.

7. Older adults are facing the growing and continuous challenge of maintaining their independence, an issue of high priority for them, and the desire to stay in their own homes—"aging in place." Many will reluctantly come to accept being cared for by their family and moving from their own home into other living arrangements (with their children or in senior living or assisted living situations).

8. Older adults have become the oldest generation in an extended family system comprising adult children, married children and their spouses, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

9. Older adults are becoming reconciled to their impending death and accepting their personal mortality. They are dealing with questions coming from the nearness of death: What is life about? How do we want to die?

10. Older adults have grown into a deeper more personal faith that is clearly their own and desire ways to continually enrich their faith life.

11. Older adults are actively engaged in the life of faith communities. They prefer a more traditional worship experience with familiar hymns and words. They value the Bible and the Christian tradition and desire to continue their learning as Christians.

12. Older adults have a hunger for God and a desire to continue growing spiritually.

Guide 2

Target the spiritual and religious diversity of adults.

   Adult faith formation programs, activities, and resources need to be *targeted* and *tailored* to the unique religious and spiritual profiles of adults. One way to view the diverse types of adult religiosity and faith practices is to place them on a continuum from adults with a vibrant faith and actively engaged to adults who are spiritual but not religious to those who unaffiliated and uninterested. (For more information see chapter 1 in *Faith Formation 2020* by John Roberto, LifelongFaith, 2010.)

Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement	Occasional but Uncommitted	Spiritual but Not Religious	Unaffiliated and Uninterested

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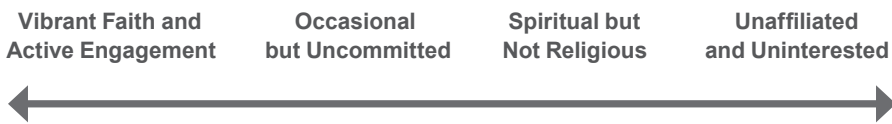
Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first type describes adults who are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. These adults have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that engages adults—mind, body, heart, and spirit—in a diversity of ways to grow in faith for a lifetime and live their faith in the world.

Participating Occasionally but Uncommitted

The second type describes adults who attend church activities, but are not actively engaged in their church community or spiritually committed. They may participate in significant seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, and celebrate sacraments and milestone events, such as marriage and baptism. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, these adults do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that recognizes that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (spiritual commitment) and a more vibrant faith, and develop approaches for increasing people's engagement with the church community and the Christian tradition.

Spiritual but Not Religious

The third type describes adults who are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but most likely are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service, or in online spiritual resources and communities. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among young adults. Congregations are challenged to become more missional—reaching people where their live (physical and online communities), building relationships, engaging in spiritual conversations, and offering programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth.

Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The fourth type describes adults who experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated and Uninterested reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among young adults. Congregations are challenged to find ways to "plant" themselves in the midst of the cultures and worlds of the Unaffiliated and Uninterested, build relationships, and be witnesses to the Christian faith in the world today. Congregations need to develop strategies and approaches for moving faith formation from the church campus into the world.

The Spiritual but Not Religious and the Unaffiliated and Uninterested are a special focus of missional adult faith formation (see guide 10). Barna Research has identified three types of young adults in these categories:

- **Nomads.** The most common spiritual journey is that of the nomads. This group is comprised of eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds with a Christian background who walk away from church engagement, but still consider themselves Christians. A person in this group typically has trouble identifying with a church or a particular "brand" of Christianity but would consider themselves, broadly, a Christian. They say faith and religion just aren't that important to them. Many used to be very involved in their church, but they just don't fit in anymore. These are young adults who see themselves as personally interested in God and religion, but not really in a formal or institutional expression of that faith. This is the group most likely to say they love Jesus but not the church—or that they are "spiritual but not religious." They might appear to be wandering, but they would never claim to have lost their faith.

- **Prodigals.** Prodigals are those who have lost their faith. This group is made up of young adults who used to claim a personal faith, but no longer claim any Christian belief. They describe themselves as fairly certain they won't ever return to the Christian faith. Christian beliefs no longer make sense to them. Many admit to having had a negative experience in church or with Christians. They don't believe their spiritual needs can be met by Christianity. This is the group that most often gets lumped in with the "Nones," even though they might not be totally opposed to faith and spirituality. Rather, they have often had some kind of experience or realization that has made it impossible to reconcile their life with the Christian faith. Often this is either tied to some kind of intellectual change or emotional injury, leading to a long-term dismissal of the Christian faith.

- **Exiles.** This group has a tough time finding a place in a church setting, but has chosen to remain within an institutional church context. They feel "lost" somewhere between their commitments to church and their desire to stay connected with the world around them. These young adults with a Christian background struggle to connect their faith or church with their everyday lives, and yet they continue in their Christian faith despite these headwinds. They remain Christian and continue to attend a church, but they find that church to be a difficult place for them to live out their faith. This group is defined by wanting to figure out how to follow Jesus in the day-to-day aspects of their lives. They say God is more at work outside the church than inside the church, and they want to be a part of that ("Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials," Barna Research).

In *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*, Linda Mercadante conducted in-depth interviews with a cross section of the Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR). Mercadante organized the SBNR she interviewed into five types:

1. **Dissenters** are people who largely stay away from institutional religion. Some are "protesting dissenters" who are hurt, offended, or angry with organized religion; while others "drifted dissenters," those who simply drift out of organize religion and never go back.

2. **Casuals** are people whose religious or spiritual practices are primarily functional, i.e., a given practice, teaching, or guide helps them feel better.

3. **Explorers** are like spiritual tourists who enjoy the journey but do not plan to settle anywhere. Some explorers occasionally attend traditional or alternative services. Theologically, they are hybrids, mixing and matching seemingly disparate beliefs, techniques, and spiritual practices.

4. **Seekers** are searching for a spiritual home. Some contemplate reclaiming earlier religious identities, moving on to something slightly different, or joining a completely new religion or alternative spiritual group.

5. **Immigrants** have moved to a new spiritual "land" and are trying to adjust to this new identity and community. Adopting a new religion requires commitment, constancy, and group loyalty, characteristics that vie with the SBNR ethos (independence, freedom, non-dogmatism, and an open and questing attitude). Many people could not take the strong disjunction from their native upbringing and eventually dropped out. "Surprisingly often, the source of their discomfort was theological. A religious or spiritual group often makes certain belief assumptions these newcomers found difficult to fully embrace, even with much effort" (Mercadante 2014, 64).

SBNRs present a huge challenge for established churches. Those that provide the basics of what SBNRs look for—informality, nonhierarchical leadership, recognition of diversity, deep participation—are more likely to be comfortable for SBNRs. Mercadante emphasizes the need for churches to address "four theological loci—the sacred (God), human nature (theological anthropology), community (ecclesiology), and the afterlife (eschatology)—and bring SBNRs' misperceptions and challenges out into the open" (Mercadante 2012).

Guide 3

Offer a wide variety of programming to address the diversity of adults' lives.

One of the key features of twenty-first century faith formation is providing a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood. This includes providing a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections in a variety of learning environments that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces.

To address the increasing diversity within the adult population, churches need to offer a greater variety of adult faith formation topics and activities. In the past churches have often chosen the "one size fits all" mentality for adult faith formation: How do we get every adult to participate in a small faith-sharing group or to come to the Lenten series or to study the Bible? Adult faith formation is no longer about finding *the* program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with a variety of faith formation activities. It is offering faith formation programming that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing. It is meeting individuals at the point of their spiritual and learning needs and offering personalized pathways of faith growth. By expanding the options for adult learning (offering "something for everyone"), churches can

engage more adults in faith formation, even if some of the offerings involve only one person. The new reality of faith formation programming is that churches can offer activities that cater to niches— individuals and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue. They no longer have to worry about reaching a "mass audience."

Today, we can diversify faith formation offerings and tailor them to people's needs and busy lives. This movement from "one sizes fits all" to a variety of faith formation offerings is made possible by the abundance of religious content—print, audio, video, online, and digital—and programming that is now available. And this is made possible by the creation of an online platform (website and social media) that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and programming with a variety of ways to learn that is easily accessible and available, anytime and any-where. Adult faith formation becomes personal, portable, and participatory—the key characteristics of the mobile technology revolution.

Guide 4

Use multiple environments for programming.

Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments, in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. The seven environments provide a way to offer a diver-sity of programs in different learning environments, as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments—all of which provides adults with more options to participate in adult faith formation and broadens the scope of faith formation offerings. The seven environments include: independent (on your own/self-directed), with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and in the community and world. A variety of learning methods can be used with each of these seven learning environments. Creating this variety of learning environments is aided by the development of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the faith formation offerings.

Independent (on your own/self-directed)

Independent programming provides maximum flexibility for the learner—when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning for busy adults. Congrega-tions can serve as guide to helping adults find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs, and then deliver that programming online at the church's faith formation website.

With a Mentor

Mentoring provides a one-to-one relationship for faith formation that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or for those who want to explore Jesus and Christianity after leaving church earlier in life. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring older adults on the use of digital tools and media.

At Home

At home programming provides individuals and whole families with faith formation programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life, and delivered through a faith formation website. This can include a wide variety of digital media and online programs and resources, such as online learning programs, resources for the church year seasons, Sunday worship resources, online communities and support groups, and links to online faith formation resources and resource centers.

In Small Groups

Small group programming provides an excellent way to address the diversity of adult needs by organizing a variety of small groups with each one targeted to a particular need or topic. Small groups also provide lots of flexibility in schedule and location. Groups can meet at times and places that best fit members' lives, such as group that meets for breakfast weekly at the local restaurant or for coffee at a local coffee shop. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the congregation to sponsor small group programs. Congregational leaders can provide resources, support, and training for leaders, thereby enabling adults to organize their own small groups. Small group programming can take many different forms including:

- Discipleship or faith sharing groups or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological formation study groups, theme- or issue-oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith sharing groups, book study groups.
- Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups, and service/faith in action groups.
- Support groups such as parent groups, caregiving groups, and life transition groups.
- Ministry groups involved in leadership in the church and world.

Study-action small groups combine study with an experiential hands-on action project. One type of study-action model focuses on engaging adults in the ministry of justice and service, weaving together study, small group learning, retreat experiences, and action projects. (The programs from JustFaith Ministries: http://justfaith.org are a good example of this.) A second type of study-action model involves ministry or leadership groups that prepare for their particular ministry or leadership role through study accompanied by actual involvement. This type of learning involves a continuous cycle of study-action-study-action, as the adults' involvement in action generates new learning needs.

In Large Groups

Large-group programming provides a way to serve a large number of adults on topics that appeal to a wide audience. Here is a sampling of large-group programming:

- Multi-session programs, such as multi-week courses on theological themes, books of the Bible, parenting at particular stages of family life, adult life issues).
- One-session program, such as a monthly session on a theological topic.
- Speaker series, such as a multi-evening or multi-week program focused around particular theological themes, Christian practices, current events, or the season of the church year.
- Roundtable discussions with refreshments after Sunday worship, such as exploring the Sunday Scripture readings in age groups or intergenerational groups.
- Parent parallel learning program at the same time as their children's program.
- Workshops, such as one day programs targeted to specific life issues—parenting, midlife issues, aging, and more.
- Film festivals that explore key themes such as relationships, social issues, and meaning in life (explore faith themes in the films).
- Field trips, such as visiting an art museum or attending a musical or theatrical performance (explore faith themes in art or music or drama).
- Retreat experiences in an evening, one-day, or weekend format at church or at a retreat center.
- Intergenerational programs for all ages in the congregation.

In the Congregation

Congregational programming focuses on the events already present in the life of the church: Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, sacramental and ritual celebrations, works of justice and acts of service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual

congregation. Faith formation can provide experiences for people to *prepare*—with the appropriate knowledge and practices—for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith and to *guide* their *participation* and *reflection* upon those events. Congregational programming includes leadership and ministry in the congregation and to the world—providing the opportunity for faith formation to prepare people for leadership and ministry, and to reflect upon their engagement.

In the Community and World

Programming in the community and world provides a way for congregations to utilize existing programs and activities outside the church as part of an adult faith formation plan. This involves researching the resources and programs being offered locally in the community (programs, courses, clinics, workshops, presentations, and more), at community colleges and universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, and more; and nationally/globally through national organizations, religious organizations, online resource centers, and more. This is an important environment for developing initiatives for serving, working for justice, and caring for creation. Many organizations—locally, nationally, and globally—have already created programs that be adopted by the congregation.

Guide 5

Enhance participation in programming by building on adult motivation and learning effectiveness.

Research studies on adult learning point to motivation as a key factor in determining whether or not adults will participate in an adult faith formation offering. *The key motivation in adult learning is that adults are motivated to learn and grow as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.* The research tells us to be aware of a variety of adult motivations and design activities that utilize these motivational factors.

- Adults are motivated when facing life transitions. The most teachable moments in an adult's life have been found to be transitional times, when adults are negotiating critical passages. They seek learning and support to cope with changes in their lives that give rise to new developmental tasks, e.g., raising children, aging parents, financial matters, job changes, divorce, and so forth.
- Adults are motivated when there is a *gap* between their present level of understanding, skill, performance and/or growth and the desired level or goal that they set for themselves or that their organization or community expects of them.

- Adults are motivated by appealing to personal and spiritual growth and/or personal benefits.
- Adults are motivated when they identify they have a need to learn.
- Adults are motivated when the benefits of a learning experience outweigh their resistance.
- Adults are motivated when programs are enjoyable and enriching.
- Adults are motivated when they have the opportunity to do something they could not do before.
- Adults are motivated by settings that have a natural, interactive, communal feel.
- Adults are motivated when programs are sensitive to their time constraints by keeping commitments short in terms of duration and offering choices of times for participation.

Studies of motivation show that adults bring diverse attitudes and expectations to their learning experiences. There area at least four different orientations for learning: a *goal-orientation* in which learning is seen as leading to a change in work or personal status, an *activity-orientation* in which participants' social interactions are especially valued, *a learning-orientation* in which a love of learning underlies the learner's engagement and participation, and a *spiritual-orientation* in which learners seek new meaning and perceive education as the starting point for thinking in new ways (Schuster and Grant).

The literature on the characteristics of adult learners provides rich insight to what matters to adults when they engage in activities. As adults strive to become independent, self-directing, and competent, they thrive in environments that help them to transform their perspective and feel empowered to effect change in their lives. Adult learners are diverse and require learning programs that accommodate the full spectrum of learning needs, styles, and preferences. This means that adult faith formation needs to:

- Utilize adults' experience and prior knowledge. Adults learn best from their own experiences. Adults bring relevant religious knowledge and life experiences to a learning program. They need the opportunity to build on their knowledge, as well as to learn from each other. Adults use their knowledge from years of experience as a filter for new information that can function as a catalyst or barrier to learning something new.
- Respect the variety of learning styles of adults with a diversity of learning experiences, recognizing that some people learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences, some through reflective observation, some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts, and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices. (See *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* by David Kolb.)

- Recognize the multiple intelligences of adults (linguistic, spatial, musical, logical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist) and use learning methods and offer programs, activities, and resources that address the variety of intelligences. (See the work of Howard Gardner.) While it may be difficult to incorporate all eight intelligences in a particular program or activity, offer programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different "intelligences"—one that is word-centered, another musical, another visual, and so forth.
- Incorporate activities that are realistic, stimulate thinking, and involve and challenge adults.
- Incorporate real-life application of learning. Adults are pragmatic; they learn best when they have an opportunity to apply theory/information to practical situations immediately in their own lives. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it. Providing ways for adults to practice what they are learning promotes the transfer of learning into their daily lives.
- Provide an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality to help build relationships among the adults. Adults learn and grow when they are physically comfortable and can socialize with others as they learn and when the climate is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences. It is important to ask adults about their experiences, needs, and perceived barriers to learning and growing in faith. Adult faith formation needs to create an atmosphere that encourages self-esteem and interdependence.
- Develop a safe, relaxed, and comfortable environment. Adult programs need to provide for the adults' physical comfort, such as refreshments, lighting, and seating. Recent research shows that learning increases in an atmosphere that is the least reminiscent of any formal schooling. Adults appreciate physical settings that have been created for adults.

Guide 6

Design online and digitally enabled strategies into all programming.

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

Every congregation needs an adult faith formation website to provide the platform for publishing and delivering adult faith formation experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources, and to engage people in learning and faith formation. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive

providers of adult faith formation, but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to adults and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, and settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online.

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

Adult faith formation can used blended models of faith formation to connect physical settings and online settings. The new digital tools, digital media, and online platforms connect adult participation in church life and events and in adult programs with their daily and home—and can reach adults at home, at work, and in daily life with personalized and customized faith formation content and experiences. Adult faith formation today can integrate online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum

ONLINE ⟵————————————⟶ FACE-TO-FACE

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

Imagine the possibilities for utilizing the five blended strategies in designing new adult programming, redesigning existing adult programming, surrounding events and programs with online content, and selecting a variety of digital programs, activities, and resources that can be used alone (fully online) or used in conjunction with face-to-face programs. (See chapter 1 for descriptions and examples of each of the five strategies on the continuum.)

Guide 7

Develop programming around the essential eight faith-forming processes.
The eight essential faith-forming processes—involving knowledge and practices of the Christian faith—facilitate faith growth *and* make a significant difference in the lives of adults. These eight faith-forming processes are central to Christian lifelong faith formation. They provide a foundation and a framework for promoting growth in faith and discipleship. In the following description, Learning and Reading the Bible are combined, as are Worshipping and Celebrating the Seasons. (For adult programming ideas and examples for the eight faith-forming processes go to www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.)

Caring Relationships

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

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

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

Celebrating Milestones and Transitions

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

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

1. *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that take place in daily life—beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage, and creating rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.

2. *Equipping* brings people together for learning, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. Opportunities are provided here to model faith practices for daily life and home life.

3. *Blessing* the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home, says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred. Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment: a prayer during worship for those participating in the milestone moment and a prayer at a small group or with family at home.

4. *Gifting* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.

5. *Reinforcing* the milestone with a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated.

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

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

Learning the Christian Tradition and Reading the Bible

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

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

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

- *Life issues*: strengths and gifts development, finances and financial security, physical health and exercise, personal interests, marital relationship, family relationships, wellness, aging.
- *Milestones and life transitions*: marriage, birth/baptism of a children, jobs and careers, changing living situations, midlife crisis, illness, divorce, empty-nest household, becoming a grandparent, retirement, successful aging, becoming a caregiver.
- *Faith enrichment*: Bible study, Christian teachings, morality and ethics, Christian practices, theological exploration, sharing faith with children and grandchildren.

- *Spiritual enrichment*: spiritual life tasks at each stage of adulthood, prayer practices, spiritual disciplines, retreat experiences, aging as a spiritual process.

Praying and Spiritual Formation

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

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

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

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

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

Serving, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation

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

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

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

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

Worshipping and Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

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

Authentic and meaningful worship enhances faith growth, and purposeful faith formation draws one into deeper and more profound worship. As the faith community journeys through the year, the events of church life provide an organic and natural sequence of faith learning for the whole community. Truly effective faith formation is anchored in the events of church life, the majority of which are marked and celebrated in the context of worship. How the community prays reveals how the community learns, and vice versa. Adult faith formation makes

worship and the seasons of the liturgical year central to programming, especially designing learning experiences that connect to Sunday worship and the content of the liturgical year feasts and seasons (see guide 8 below).

Guide 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Incorporating intergenerational dialogues into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions. And then reversing the process and providing opportunities for the older adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Developing mentoring relationships between adults and children/youth, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvements, and confirmation mentors.
- Linking people of different generations (older-to-younger or younger-to-older) in the church who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to the other, such as midlife and older adults helping young adults and new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.
- Involving the community in praying for each generation, for example when people leave on a mission trip or retreat weekend or when people celebrate a milestone, such as the birth of a child, a marriage, a graduation, and a retirement.

- Organizing social and recreational activities that build intergenerational relationships, such as an intergenerational Olympics, a Friday night simple meal during Lent, or a summer film festival (maybe outdoors on a large screen).
- Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
- Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to support the efforts of groups who work directly with the poor.
- Developing intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God's creation, and build peace.
- Sponsoring community-wide service projects that engage all ages.

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

Guide 9

Address the needs of families in each of the seasons of adulthood.
At each stage of adulthood there are significant family life issues and transitions that can be the focus of adult faith formation programming. Congregations can assist parents and grandparents in nurturing faith family life, developing their faith life, strengthening family strengths and assets, and developing skills for parenting. Congregations can develop targeted faith formation strategies for single-person families (and to non-kindred adults living together as a family). This is an important need for older adults whose spouse or partner has died and is not a single-person family.
First, congregations can focus on the whole family and design the eight faith-forming processes—with activities, practices, and resources—so that they can be embedded into the daily life of families. Provide a variety activities and resources

for each of the eight faith-forming processes delivered in different formats, but especially in digital formats that can reach families where they live and where they go. Congregations can connect with families anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time by using digital content delivered to their mobile devices (phones and tablets). Ask: How are we providing mobile content for a family to use at the dinner table, in the car, in the morning or at bedtime, or for a mom or dad to use while waiting for their children participating in sports, music, arts? This is possible today because of the abundance of faith-forming digital content available.

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

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

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

2. *Establishing routines:* family meals, shared activities, meaningful traditions (holidays, rituals, celebrations), dependability.

3. *Maintaining expectations:* openness about tough topics, fair rules, defined boundaries, clear expectations, contributions to family.

4. *Adapting to challenges:* management of daily commitments, adaptability problem-solving, democratic decision-making.

5. *Connecting to the community:* neighborhood cohesion, relationship with others in the community, participating in enriching activities, supportive resources in the community.

Fourth, congregations can assist parents and grandparents develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting. Parents and grandparents who demonstrate a close, warm, and affirming parenting style have higher religious transmission rates than cold, distant, or authoritarian parenting styles. In "What Makes a

Good Parent?" Dr. Robert Epstein identifies the ten most effective child-rearing practices—all derived from published studies and ranked based on how well they predict a strong parent-child bond and children's happiness, health, and success.

1. *Love and affection.* Parents support and accept the child, are physically affectionate, and spend quality one-on-one time together.

2. *Stress management.* Parents take steps to reduce stress for themselves and their child, practice relaxation techniques, and promote positive interpretations of events.

3. *Relationship skills.* Parents maintain a healthy relationship with their spouse, significant other, or coparent and model effective relationship skills with other people.

4. *Autonomy and independence.* Parents treat their child with respect and encourage him or her to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

5. *Education and learning.* Parents promote and model learning and provide educational opportunities for their child.

6. *Life skills.* Parents provide for their child, have a steady income, and plan for the future.

7. *Behavior management.* Parents make extensive use of positive reinforcement and punish only when other methods of managing behavior have failed.

8. *Health.* Parents model a healthy lifestyle and good habits, such as regular exercise and proper nutrition, for their child.

9. *Religion.* Parents support spiritual or religious development and participate in spiritual or religious activities.

10. *Safety.* Parents take precautions to protect their child and maintain awareness of the child's activities and friends.

Guide 10

Design missional initiatives to reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.

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

Barna Research asked the unchurched to rate how much influence thirty different approaches had on their interest in attending a church. The three approaches that seemed to have the most positive effect on the potential for returning to church were: 1) developing relationships (an invitation from a trusted friend), 2) an appealing event—such as a concert or seminar—hosted at the church, and 3) reputational appeal as reflected in ministries that serve the poor and provide mentoring and development for young people. Two additional ideas had moderate appeal: participating in a house church rather than conventional church ministry, and participating in a gathering of people from their same age group and general lifestyle (Barna and Kinnaman, 155–159).

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

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

Make contact with those not engaged in the church community by establishing third-place settings in the community that offer hospitality, build relationships,

host spiritual conversations, provide programs and activities, and nourish the spiritual life of people. A third place is the ideal setting for groups to gather, each with its own focus. Some groups emphasize studying the Bible and deepening knowledge of the faith; others emphasize expressive and artistic activities (making music, creating art or writing poetry); others are organized around a lifestyle or common interest. Some are on a contemplative path (gathering for evening prayers or spiritual exercises), while others are on an active path (working at soup kitchens, tutoring kids, building houses). Program offerings can include spiritual formation programs, life-centered clinics and workshops (for example, marriage enrichment, parenting, divorce and separation, bereavement, life and career planning, financial planning, recovery programs, dealing with depression) and an "Introduction to the Christian Faith" program (see next paragraph).

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

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

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

More Ideas and Resources

Go to www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com to find programming ideas, articles on adult faith formation programming, case studies, examples of adult faith formation programming, and links to digital resources to use in adult programming.

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Designing Twenty-First Century Adult Faith Formation

JOHN ROBERTO

How can we develop faith formation for every season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults? Adult formation for every adult is possible if we use twenty-first century practices, approaches, and resources. We will need new insights—drawn from research, theory, and practice—to inform us and guide the development of adult faith formation through the four seasons of adulthood. We will need new approaches and practices to engage all the seasons of an adult's life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today's world. We will need a new model of faith formation that provides a platform to reach *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community.

This chapter presents a planning process designed to bring to life twenty-first century adult faith formation—the holistic vision of faith and faith-forming processes, the eight practices or features of twenty-first century faith formation, and a network model of faith formation that provides a way to reach all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood.

Following is a summary of the eight key features of twenty-first century faith formation (see chapter 1 for descriptions of each feature):

1. Adult faith formation is *life-stage/generational*—addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of adulthood; and *intergenerational*—engaging adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in the intergenerational faith experiences.

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

3. Adult faith formation addresses the *diverse* life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

4. Adult faith formation provides a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood—young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

    •   Adult faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces.
    •   Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world—in online spaces and physical places to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.
    •   Adult faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning.

5. Adult faith formation recognizes that learning and growth is a *process of active inquiry* with initiative residing in the adult learner and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.

6. Adult faith formation provides the opportunity for *personalized and customized* learning and faith growth, giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Adults are guided by trusted mentors who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning and spiritual needs.

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

8. Adult faith formation intentionally nurtures *communities of learning and practice* around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

In the twenty-first century, adult faith formation is developed in a network model. On the network people can experience the life and substance of the Christian faith in a way that expands both the content and environments and can be personalized and customized to their life and faith journey. The fundamental operating system and delivery system for faith formation is now the *network* and it is built on a digital platform (website).

A Network Planning Process for Adult Faith Formation

There are twelve planning steps for developing adult faith formation in a network model.

Step 1. Prepare a statement of your church's vision and goals for adult faith formation.
Step 2. Develop a profile of adult faith formation.
Step 3. Research your target audience and identify needs.
Step 4. Build the adult faith formation network design.
Step 5. Generate programming for the adult faith formation network.
Step 6. Design a season of adult faith formation programming.
Step 7. Build the digital platform—an adult faith formation website.
Step 8. Design a process for assessing and personalizing learning.
Step 9. Test the seasonal plan and web design.
Step 10. Launch the adult faith formation network.
Step 11. Evaluate the season of adult faith formation programming.
Step 12. Design the new season of adult faith formation programming.

Preparation

First, decide on a target audience for planning. It is important to make this decision before gathering a planning task force. You can develop an adult faith formation plan for one stage of adulthood: young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), or older adults (75+), or you can develop a plan for multiple stages of adulthood, or one plan for all adults. Smaller

congregations may find it easier to develop a plan for multiple stages of adulthood. When selecting more than one stage of adulthood, it is important to develop content and approaches that reflect the particular needs of each stage (and avoid the "one size fits all" approach).

Second, develop an adult faith formation task force to design the adult faith formation plan. The task force should include: 1) the faith formation coordinator, 2) church staff and ministry leaders who work with adults (in any ministry or program), and 3) adults from the target audience you have selected. If you are developing one plan for all adults be sure to invite at least one adult from each decade of adulthood, from the twenties through the eighties. It is very helpful to have several people who bring experience and expertise in digital technologies and media, and social media.

The task force is responsible for designing an adult faith formation plan, organizing the implementation logistics, finding leaders and resources for the plan, monitoring progress, and conducting evaluations. The task force needs a coordinator/convener who facilitates the work of the task force in designing an adult faith formation plan, organizing implementation logistics, finding leaders and resources to implement the plan, monitoring progress and conducting evaluations, and serving as a liaison between the task force and the church and wider community.

Third, prepare the team by having them read chapter 1 in this book and the chapter(s) that describe your target adult audience (chapters 3–6). There is also a variety of articles on the four adult life stages on www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com, an online resource center for adult faith formation.

Planning Step 1:
Prepare a Statement of Your Church's Vision and Goals for Adult Faith Formation

Work together as a task force to prepare a short statement of your church's vision and goals for adult faith formation. As a team review the important documents on the vision and goals for adult faith formation in your denomination. You might want to invite a guest speaker to present a workshop on the goals and vision of adult faith formation or find a video presentation. You can go online to your denomination or contact your regional church body (diocese, synod, presbytery, district, etc.) for resources.

Planning Step 2:
Develop a Profile of Adult Faith Formation

Develop a profile of your church's current adult faith formation experiences, events, activities, and programming using the template on page 177. Review chapter 1 in this book for information about intergenerational, age-group, and missional faith formation with adults. Produce the profile on newsprint, in a written report, and/or on an Excel spreadsheet.

Faith-Forming Processes	Intergenerational Events and Experiences That Involve Adults	Young Adult Programs	Midlife Adult Programs	Mature Adult Programs	Older Adult Programs
Caring relationships: intergenerational and peer relationships, supportive communities					
Celebrating the liturgical seasons: feasts and seasons of the church year					
Celebrating rituals and milestones: celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones at significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey					
Reading the Bible: studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today					
Learning the Christian tradition: learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world					
Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation: personal and communal prayer, being formed by the spiritual disciplines					
Serving and justice: living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice					
Worshipping God with the faith community: experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist, and being sent forth on mission					

Develop a profile of your congregation's current missional activities with adults using the two categories in the template below. Produce the profile on newsprint, in a written report, and/or on an Excel spreadsheet.

Target Adult Audience	Expanding and extending the church's presence through outreach in the community	Pathways to Jesus, discipleship, and the Christian faith

Review the profiles, using the following questions to discuss the results.

1.   What are the strengths in our current adult faith formation?

2.   What are the areas in need of development?

3.   Who are we currently serving? Who are we *not* serving? Do we have outreach and programming directed toward the "churchless"—the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested?

4.   Do we have strong intergenerational connections and programming for this target audience?

5.   Are we utilizing online/digital programming and resources with this target audience?

6.   Do we have a variety of learning environments for this target audience: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, churchwide, in the community, and in the world?

Planning Step 3:
Research Your Target Audience and Identify Needs

Planning begins with listening. Take time to conduct research on your target audience(s): young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–mid 50s, mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), or older adults (75+). Be sure to read the chapter(s) in this book that describe your target adult audience (chapters 3–6). A variety of articles on the four adult life stages is at www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com, an online resource center for adult faith formation.

Adult faith formation addresses the whole life of adults—social, ethnic–cultural, psychological, physical, spiritual, religious, and more. Research the lives of adults using these five categories.

1. *Life-stage.* What's happening in the lives and world of young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults today: developmental life tasks, family life, work life, leisure, relationships, sexuality, suffering and grief, social and political issues, community issues, and more?

2. *Generational.* What is the generational identity and the unique generational characteristics and needs of millennials (young adults), Generation X (midlife adults), baby boomers (mature adults), and builders (older adults)?

3. *Milestones and transitions.* What are the significant milestones and transitions in the lives of adults: marriages, births, graduations, geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, launching children and empty nests, retirement, unanticipated illness, divorce, loss of loved ones, and more?

4. *Ethnic/cultural life.* What are the unique lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of adults within the ethnic/cultural communities represented in the congregation and wider community? What are the unique faith traditions and practices of adults in these ethnic/cultural communities?

5. *Spiritual and religious journeys.* What are the significant spiritual and religious needs, interests, and concerns at each stage of adulthood? What are the unique characteristics and needs of adults across the spectrum of faith and practice—from adults who are growing in faith and actively engaged in the church community to adults who are spiritual but not religious and not involved in the church community to adults who are unaffiliated from established religion?

Conduct Focus Group Research with Adults

Organize focus groups of eight–twelve adults in the target audience(s) you have selected. If you selected multiple adult life stages, organize at least one focus group for each life stage. If you selected one life stage, organize several focus groups of adults in that life stage. Select a diversity of adults in each focus group, reflecting ethnic/cultural diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and spiritual and religious diversity (from the actively engaged to the "churchless"). Meet for about one hour in a variety of locations and times. Remember that people who are not involved in church may be hesitant to come to a meeting at church. Have two people lead each focus group—one to record (on a computer or tablet is preferable) and one to ask the questions. The recorder can also ask follow-up questions as appropriate. Use the following questions as a guide for developing focus group interviews. Every focus

group needs to use the same questions so that comparisons can be made across the groups. In a sixty-minute focus group there is usually time for at least seven questions that you can select from the following list. Feel free to adapt the questions for your church, but make sure everyone uses the same questions.

1. How would you describe your age group in key words or phrases?

2. What are some of the key life tasks that your age group is experiencing?

3. What are some of the important life issues that your age group is experiencing today?

4. What are the most meaningful experiences you have in life? What makes these experiences meaningful to you?

5. How important is your relationship with God? Why?

6. Where do you experience God most?

7. What are the significant spiritual issues that your age group is experiencing today?

8. What is most important to you about being a Christian (or a member of a particular denomination or faith tradition) today?

9. How do you live your Christian faith? Name some of the ways you put your faith into practice.

10. How can the church help you to continue growing as a Christian? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see your church offer for your age group.

Compile the results from focus groups by identifying patterns or recurring themes in the life tasks, and spiritual and religious needs. Also pay attention to information that may be unique to one focus group. Sometimes this uncovers important insights about the target audience.

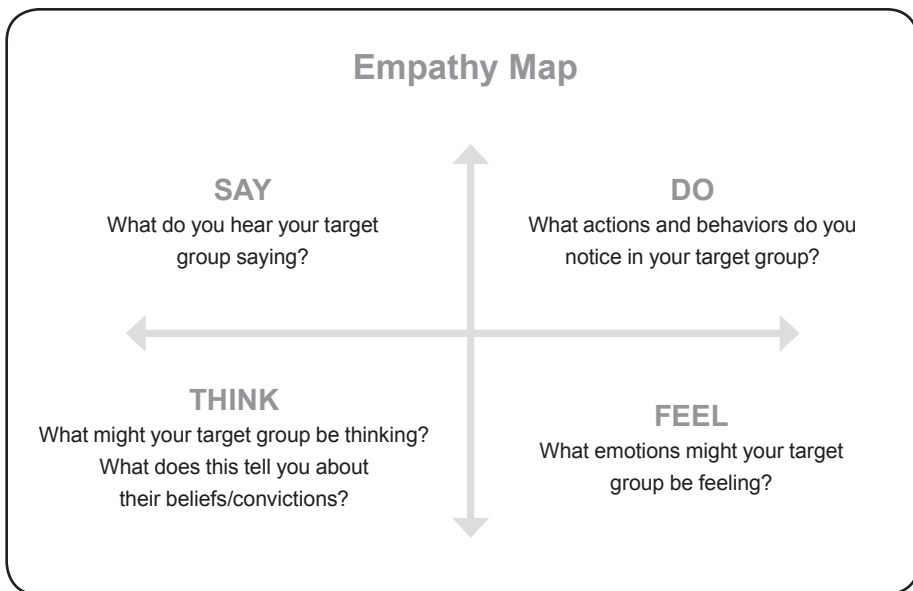## Conduct Observation of the Target Audience in the Community

Engage the team in becoming anthropologists by observing adults in the community. Develop an observation checklist and ask team members to spend a week simply observing people at work, at play, at stores, in coffee shops and restaurants, and so on. Watch for things like:

1. What are some of the most popular activities in the community?

2. Where do people gather outside of work and school—coffee shop, gym, mall, park, community center, YMCA/YWCA, and so on? What are they doing there?

3.   Where do people work? Do most people work in the community or do they commute to another area? What types of jobs do people have?

4.   What are the most popular or well–attended churches in the community?

5.   Where are people on Sunday morning, if they are not at worship?

Find Patterns in the Research Findings

An "Empathy Map," developed by the Stanford School of Design, is one tool to synthesize observations and draw out insights from the research. Organize research findings into the following four quadrants: What are people saying, doing, thinking, and feeling? Do this activity as a research team and use one or more sheets of newsprint to compile the findings. If you address multiple adult life stages, it would be helpful to do an Empathy Map for each life stage.

Empathy Map

SAY
What do you hear your target group saying?

DO
What actions and behaviors do you notice in your target group?

THINK
What might your target group be thinking? What does this tell you about their beliefs/convictions?

FEEL
What emotions might your target group be feeling?

Review the results of the Empathy Map and identify the most important *needs, interests, issues,* and *concerns* of each adult life stage using the categories below. Record them on newsprint or create a report for everyone.

• life–stage issues (developmental needs, concerns, interests)
• generational issues
• milestones and life transitions
• ethnic and cultural needs
• spiritual and religious needs

Planning Step 4:
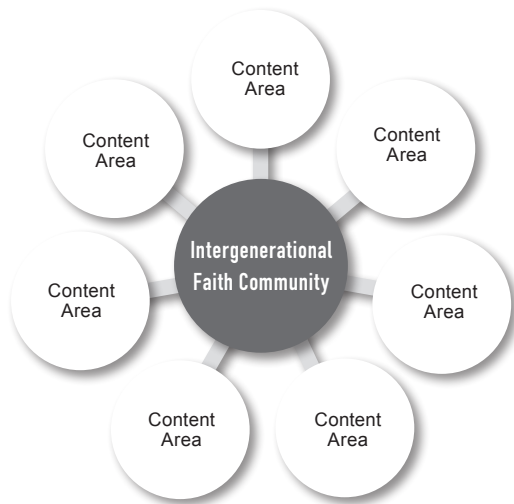# Build the Adult Faith Formation Network Design

Begin building the adult faith formation network by determining the content areas appropriate for the target audience. Use the eight faith-forming processes as the basic framework for the network and then add new content areas to address missional—outreach, missional—pathways, adult life issues, adult life-stage role such as parents or grandparents.

Diagram your network on a sheet of newsprint. Be comprehensive even if it looks overwhelming. You can always combine content areas or modify them later in the process. An example on page 183 illustrates a faith formation network design for adults.

Building a Faith Formation Network

FOUNDATIONAL CONTENT AREAS

1. **Caring relationships**
2. **Celebrating the liturgical seasons**
3. **Celebrating rituals and milestones**
4. **Learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life**
5. **Praying and spiritual formation**
6. **Reading the Bible**
7. **Serving people in need, working for justice, caring for creation**
8. **Worshipping God within the faith community**
9. **Life issues**
10. **Missional**
11. **Life stage**
12. **Major programs**

Example: Adult Faith Formation Network (Adults in their 50s–mid 70s)

The Adult Faith Formation Network incorporates the eight faith-forming process, combines celebrating rituals and milestones with adult life issues because of similar content, adds missional, life issues, and a life–stage role for grandparents. See the end of chapter 1 (beginning on page 27) to read descriptions of the programming in each content area of the Adult Faith Formation Network.

Planning Step 5:
Generate Programming for the Adult Faith Formation Network

With the network design set, programming can be added to each content area. Use the following process to generate programming ideas for each content area of the network. Generate a list of all the possible programs, activities, and resources that *could* be included in the network. This list becomes the database of ideas that can be used to develop each season of program for the network.

1.   Correlate the most important needs from the research into the appropriate content areas of the adult network you have just created in step 4. Some of the important needs will be included in multiple content areas. (See the results of step 3.)

2.   Add the faith formation programs that will continue to be offered for the target audience into the appropriate content areas of the adult network. Some programs may be listed more than once. (See the completed profile forms from step 2.)

3.   Add events, ministries, and programs from the intergenerational faith community into the appropriate content areas of the adult network. Some events/programs may be listed more than once. (See the completed profile form from step 2.)

Use a large newsprint sheet to record information and to see the whole picture of network programming. It would also be easy to create an Excel spreadsheet with all of this information.

Generate New Programming Ideas

Generate ideas for new programming for each content area on the adult network. Programs can be conducted in online spaces and physical places; in a variety of settings: on your own (self-directed), mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world; and with a variety of programs, activities, and resources—print, audio, video, and digital/online. Programming can be intergenerational utilizing the life, events, and ministries of the intergenerational faith community in adult faith formation.

Be sure to consider the variety of digital strategies in blended faith formation (see chapter 1 for description). Adult faith formation can be *digitally enabled*—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and *digitally connected*—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media. You can use blended strategies in redesigning existing programming or in developing new programming.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum

ONLINE ⟷ FACE-TO-FACE

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

Use the following questions to help you generate ideas. Record the ideas on newsprint for all to see. Be sure to consult the ideas for adult faith formation in chapter 8 of this book and online at www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

1. What new programming do we need to offer to address the needs that surfaced in our research?

2. What would our target audience like to see the church offer them through faith formation?

3. How can we address the audience's needs through age-specific programming?

4. How can we address the audience's needs through intergenerational or family programming?

5. How can we develop missional outreach programming and strategies to reach the "churchless" in our target audience?

Here's a creative alternative to simple brainstorming called "'What If' You Used Your Imagination?" The easiest way to begin is by saying: "I need fresh and novel ideas to solve my challenge. I will suspend all judgment and see what free and easy ideas we can think up. It doesn't matter how weird or offbeat they are." Allow your team the freedom to conceptualize without judging ideas in terms of the real world. Ask team members to list as many "what if" statements as they can on

Post-it® notes (for example, "What if we developed a community café to reach people who are spiritual, but not involved in the church community?"). Ask them to complete the "What if . . ." statement personally, writing one statement per Post-it. After several minutes, ask people to place their Post-it notes on a sheet of easel paper. Then cluster similar ideas together. When ideas are grouped based on common characteristics or themes, an organization and structure begins to arise from the information. More ideas are generated as people begin to see the structure and fill in the gaps. A sense of priority is often revealed as one or more of the clusters claim the energy and interest of the group.

Compile a Complete Report of Potential Programming

Use the template below to compile a report of the results. This report presents all of the ideas from which seasonal plans can be designed: January–April, May–August, and September–December.

Target Audience:			
Network content areas	Current programming in this content area	Intergenerational events/programs	New program ideas for this content area

Planning Step 6:
Design a Season of Adult Faith Formation Programming

The most manageable way to program a faith formation network is to develop a three-season approach: January–April, May–August, and September–December. This means launching new programming three times and year and completely updating your website three times a year with the new programming as well as recurring programming. (For an example of a season of programming for adults see the Adult Formation Network at the end of chapter 1. For an illustration of an adult network and website go to: http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com.)

All of the network content areas do not need to be introduced in the first season of programming. Over the course of a year (three seasons) network content areas and programming can be added so that the complete plan is finally implemented in the fourth season. Some of the programming will be consistent in every season, while other programming will be specific to a season. Programming from a completed season is archived online (on the website) so that it can be reused in another season or re-introduced a year later.

Here is a guide to developing one season of programming. Develop a first draft of the season and then review all of the programming and make final choices about what to include in the season. Use the template below and record the information on newsprint sheets to get a overall view of the season.

Seasonal Plan				
Network Content Area	**Programming & Dates**			
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4

First, identify the season: January 1–May 1 or May 1–September 1 or September 1–January 1.

Second, add continuing adult programs to the seasonal plan. Use the seasonal plan template to record the results: list the network content areas and then add the programs to the appropriate month.

Third, add intergenerational events and programs that involve adults to the seasonal plan.

Fourth, add new programming to the seasonal plan. Try to provide new (or current) programs in *different learning environments* and/or one program in multiple learning environments: on your own (self-directed), with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, in the community, in the world. Try to implement a program idea with a *blended (digital) faith formation* strategy: gathered program with online content, gathered program and online content, online and gathered in one program, mostly online, and fully online.

Fifth, develop the final version of the seasonal plan. Select the program ideas for each network content area. Some content areas may have too many programs to

launch in one season. Select the ones that will be included in this season and save the other program ideas for another season.

Schedule programming in each network content area. Some of the programming flows through multiple months in a season, such as a weekly Bible study group. Some programs are monthly, while other programs are seasonal—Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter—and therefore anchored in one or more months. Still other programming/resources are always available, such as an online course or a video program or Bible study resources.

One way to manage the variety of programming is to focus on one month of major programming in the network content areas. For example the "Learning the Tradition" content area might select one month to schedule its theology enrichment series with four presentations from guest experts and options for small group study and online study using the video recordings. The Bible area might focus its programming in a different month, perhaps around a church year season, such as Lent. This approach reduces the overlap among major programming and helps people participate in multiple experiences. See the example at the end of step 7. For an online example of this monthly approach view http://holytrinity adults.weebly.com.

Final Plan for the Season

Network Content Area	Programming & Dates			
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4

Lastly, develop specific plans for each program. Include the following information:

- date or month
- learning environment(s)
- digital strategy(s)
- resources
- leaders
- cost

Planning Step 7:
Build the Digital Platform—An Adult Faith Formation Website

Building a digital platform (website) is essential to the network approach to faith formation.

This digital platform provides the primary way to connect adults to the network's offerings and to connect adults with each other. A faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering the experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources of the network. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online. And it is available to people anytime, anywhere, and any device (computer, tablet, smart phone).

It is important to build a website dedicated to adult faith formation. There can be a website for each adult faith formation network or a website that integrates all adults with specific sections for each adult life stage. Most church websites are not equipped for this task. They lack the features, ease-of-use, capacity, or focus on faith formation to become the digital platform for a network. Today it is much easier to develop a new dedicated website for adult faith formation and then link it to the church website.

Building a website is made much easier today by the availability of online website builders that provide predesigned website templates, drag-and-drop features to create webpages, and hosting for the website. Three popular website builders to explore are: *Weebly* (www.weebly.com), *Wix* (www.wix.com), and *Squarespace* (www.squarespace.com). All three have easy to use features and very reasonable subscription fees. For advanced users *WordPress* (http://wordpress.org) provides thousands of predesigned templates, lots of customization features, and ready-to-use apps. *WordPress* does require an understanding of web design and some programming ability.

Weebly, *Wix*, and *Squarespace* have detailed tutorials for designing a website. Go to their websites to view the tutorials. There are also independent websites with tutorials and how-to instructions for designing a website, some specific to these three website builders. There are dozens of websites created by *WordPress* users that are dedicated to providing assistance to designers. And, or course, there are YouTube videos that teach the basics of web design, and provide particular information for *Weebly*, *Wix*, *Squarespace*, and *WordPress*.

Here are several suggestions for web usability from Steve Krug's excellent and easy-to-use book *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, Third Edition (Berkeley: New Riders, 2014).

1. Don't make the user think—make web pages self-explanatory so the user hardly has any perceived effort to understand them, or example, clear choice of labels, clearly "clickable" items, simple search.

2. People generally don't read web pages closely; they scan, so design for scanning rather than reading.

3. Create a clear visual hierarchy and menu system (main menu, submenus).

4. Make it very clear how to navigate the site, with clear "signposts" on all pages.

5. Omit needless words.

6. The home page needs the greatest design care to convey site identity and mission.

7. Promote user goodwill by making the typical tasks easy to do, make it easy to recover from errors, and avoid anything likely to irritate users.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide step-by-step instructions for designing a website, there are specific features that can help customize a website design for the requirements of a adult faith formation network and the seasonal plan you have created.

First, choose a domain name (URL) for the adult faith formation website. The congregation can either purchase a new domain name for the faith formation website from one of the companies that sell and register domain names or use a free domain name provided by the website builder, e.g., *Weebly* provides hosting and a free website URL with the weebly.com extension, such as http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com.

Second, select a website template that is mobile-responsive, which means that the website will automatically size itself correctly on a computer, laptop, tablet, or phone. The template should do this automatically.

Third, create the primary navigation (main menus) for the website directly from the network content areas. Be sure to select a website template that allows enough room for all of the menu items to be seen. Today's website design favors horizontal menus (running across the webpage), rather than vertical menus (running on the left side of the webpage). Select the template that provides enough room for the menus.

There may be a need to consolidate several content areas of the network to accommodate the website design template. This involves creating submenus (secondary navigation) under the main menu items. Here is an example of the Adult Faith Formation Network outlined on page 183 using short titles that will fit across a webpage.

1. Worship

2. Seasons

3. Scripture

4.   Spirituality

5.   Study

6.   Discovering Faith

7.   Service

8.   Life Issues

9.   Grandparents

(See the example at http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com.)

A well-designed site with clear and easy to understand navigation will increase engagement and the time people spend on the website.

Fourth, build each webpage to incorporate all of the programs, activities, and resources for the particular network content area in the seasonal plan. A well-designed site with quality content will increase engagement and create a positive experience for the user—all of which encourages continuous learning.

Each webpage includes content that is uploaded to the website for people to use—audio podcasts, videos, articles, blog posts, interactive features—as well as descriptions and links to programs, activities, and resources that reside on other websites, such as online courses. Webpages can include stable content that is going to be available in every season and seasonal or calendar-specific content.

Each webpage is a "learning page" where people can learn online, download resources, and connect to activities and resources across the web. Here are two examples of webpage design for an adult network from the online example: http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com.

Adult Learning Page: November Scripture Enrichment

Focus: Gospel of the New Lectionary Cycle beginning in Advent
Programming:

1.   Three-session speaker series on major themes in the gospel: Thursday from 7:30–9:00 pm at the church center.

2.   Video presentations of the three sessions online for self study.

3.   Video presentations of the three sessions online for small group study with accompanying study guide.

4.   Scripture study groups using a four-session introduction to the major themes of the gospel conducted at church, in homes, and in the community.

5.   Gospel self-study using links to Scripture websites such as www.enterthe-bible.org from Luther Seminary.

6.   Online course on the gospel with one or more links to existing online courses at a seminary or university or on iTunes U in the Apple iTunes Store.

Adult Learning Page: Spiritual Formation

Focus: Spiritual Practices for Adults
Programming:

1.   Five-session spiritual practices course: Wednesday from 7:00–9:00 pm at the church center. Sessions include: Prayer Styles & Traditions, Fixed-Hour Prayer, Contemplation & Meditation, Spiritual Reading & Praying with Art and Music, Sabbath. Course book: *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* by Ruth Haley Barton (Intervarsity Press, 2006).

2.   Video presentations of the five sessions online for self study.

3.   Video presentations of the five sessions online for small group study with accompanying study guide.

4.   "Book of the Month" Small Groups: *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, 2011).

5.   "Take a Course or Make a Retreat with a Spiritual Master"—online at Spirituality&Practice.com.

6.   "Online Ignatian Retreat" from Creighton University.

7.   Links to resources for daily devotion for adults.

8.   Links to resources on prayer forms and styles for adults.

Fifth, design the website specifically for your adult target audiences and write the content for them in their language with titles and examples that connect to their lives; select images (photo or short video) that reflect their life situations. Engage the target audience and tell them what they need to know and do.

Be sure to pay careful attention to the titles and descriptions so that they capture adults' interests. Develop descriptions that are positive in tone and indicate clearly the content or focus of an activity. Describe how your offerings respond to something within the lives of adults. Highlight the relationship between the content and the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of adults. Describe the two to three benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation.

Planning Step 8:
Design a Process for Assessing and Personalizing Learning

An important component of a network approach to learning is giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. An adult faith formation network, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, can guide adults in creating their own personal learning pathways. Churches can develop processes for helping adults (online and in-person) to:

1. discern learning and faith growth needs

2. work with a mentor or guide to create a plan for faith growth and learning and find resources on the network

3. engage in faith formation experiences

4. reflect on their learning with a mentor/guide or small group

5. identify new needs for growth and learning

A *faith-growth learning plan* helps adults identify where they are on their spiritual journey, what they need for continuing their growth, who else might share that need, and the resources that could help them meet that need. Congregations can provide mentors or guides to assist people in developing their growth plan, accessing the programs and resources that fit their plan, and evaluating their learning.

First, identify people who can serve as mentors or guides to help adults discern their learning needs; find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs; and assist with the implementation of the faith growth plan.

Second, design a discernment tool, specific to the adults, to guide adults in assessing their learning and faith growth needs. The discernment tool can be used in a group setting with a facilitator, in a one on one setting with a mentor or guide, or in an online setting with instructions for its use and how to find programs, activities, and resources to match with learning needs.

Third, design a faith growth learning plan with worksheets and samples of completed plans. Give people a sense of the flow from discerning needs to finding resources on the network to implementing their plan. (For examples of assessment tools and faith growth plans go to www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.)

Planning Step 9:
Test the Seasonal Plan and Web Design

It's wise to conduct one or two focus group meetings of the adult target audience to get feedback on the seasonal plan and the usability of the web design. Testing is an opportunity to learn more about the user through observation and engagement. (For insights on testing the web design see chapter 9, "Usability Testing on 10 Cents a Day," in *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* [Third Edition] by Steve Krug).

Begin by identifying adults within the target audience to test the website and give feedback on the seasonal programming. Invite them to a focus group meeting. Use a deliberate procedure when you test. Create a "testing process" so that you can gain important feedback. Here are four suggestions:

1. Let your user experience the network online. Show; don't tell. Let them review the website and the programming. Provide just the minimum context so they understand what to do. (Have computers or tablets available for people to use or ask them to bring a device to the focus group.)

2. Have them talk through their experience. For example, when appropriate, ask, "Tell me what you are thinking as you are doing this."

3. Actively observe. Watch how they use (and misuse!) the website. Don't immediately "correct" what your user is doing.

4. Follow up with questions, such as: "Show me why this would (or would not) work for you." "Can you tell me more about how this made you feel and why?" "Do you find things that interest you and connect with your life?" "Are there things you would have liked to see?"

Based on the feedback from the focus group(s), determine what revisions to make in programming and website design. Consider inviting members of the focus group(s) to become reviewers throughout the season of programming. Stay in regular communication with them, asking for feedback on their experience of the website and the programming.

Planning Step 10:
Launch the Adult Faith Formation Network

Generate ideas for promoting and introducing the faith formation network and website to members of the adult target audience—those active in the congregation church and those not participating in the congregation. Develop church-wide and targeted strategies for promotion.

In your promotional efforts be sure to describe how your offerings respond to something within the lives of adults. Highlight the relationship between the season of programming and the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of people. Describe the two to three benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation. Explain to people how to use the network and how to access the activities and resources.

Use as many promotional methods as you can. Consider the following ideas:

1. Ask those who are participating in church life and faith formation to invite their friends and colleagues. Ask people to use their social networks to promote the faith formation offerings.

2. Promote engagement online by connecting to (or extending from) a gathered event, program, or ministry.

3. Send email, text messages, and/or regular e-newsletters to targeted groups (use a service like Constant Contact or Mail Chimp or Flock Note).

4. Establish an adult faith formation Facebook page for network announcements, updates, stories, and photos from people engaged in faith formation.

5. Use Twitter to announce updates, events, and invite reflections from people on their experiences in the network.

6. Purchase targeted adds on Facebook and Twitter.

7. Provide ways to share experiences using blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram: videos, reports, photos, and so forth. Have a contest to encourage submissions and give a prize to the best photo, video, or report.

8. Have the pastor share the benefits and information of the adult faith formation network at Sunday worship.

9. Host information sessions after Sunday worship and other gathered programs to describe the adult faith formation network and how to use it.

10. Include information about the adult faith formation network in new member packets, baptism preparation materials, and other points of first-contact with adults. Send a personalized invitation to new members.

11. Promote the adult faith formation network at all gathered programs and events in the church.

Be sure to find ways to communicate the stories and examples of the benefits and blessings that are coming to adults and to the whole church community. Consider short video or audio interviews of people who are engaged and then upload them to the church website and the faith formation website, as well as Facebook.

Planning Step 11:
## Evaluate Adult Faith Formation Programming

There are two essential times to evaluate programming: at the completion of a program or activity and at the end of a season of programming.

A *program evaluation* can be as simple as embedding an evaluation onto the website with individual programs and activities so that adults can complete an evaluation as soon as the program or activity concludes. It is also easy to develop an evaluation form on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and provide a link on the website to the online evaluation. SurveyMonkey compiles the results of the evaluation and produces a report of the results that can then be printed. (There are sample educational evaluation tools on SurveyMonkey that can be adapted.)

A *seasonal evaluation* reviews both programming and the website design and usability. The seasonal evaluation combines face-to-face evaluation meetings with online evaluation tools such as SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

For the *face-to-face seasonal evaluation*: gather small groups of people (twelve to twenty) who participated in programming and utilized the website. Conduct this activity *twice*: once to get feedback on the content of the network—what people participated in, and second for the design and usability of the faith formation network. Make a copy of the four-quadrant grid below on newsprint or a whiteboard to capture people's feedback in four different areas. Draw a plus in the upper left quadrant, a triangle in the upper right quadrant, a question mark in the lower left quadrant, and a light bulb in the lower right quadrant.

- The upper left quadrant is for things people liked or found notable (in the programming and website).
- The upper right quadrant is for constructive criticism.
- The lower left quadrant is for questions that the experience raised in the lives of the people.
- The lower right quadrant is for ideas that the experiences spurred.
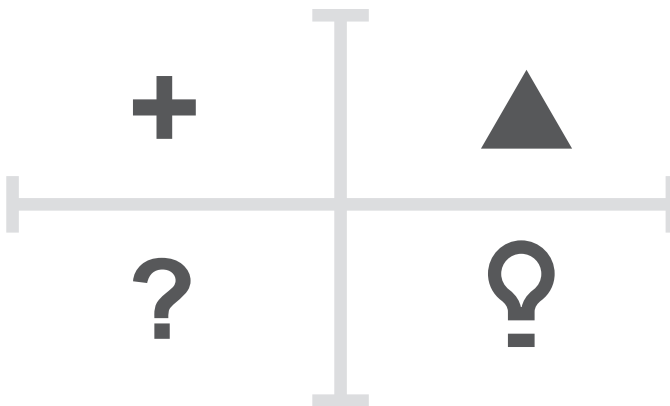
For *online seasonal evaluation*: Develop an evaluation form on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and provide a link on the faith formation website and church website to the online evaluation. Design the online evaluation in two sections: an evaluation of seasonal programming and an evaluation of the website design and usability. Be sure to have people indicate if they did not participate in a program by adding a response to each question such as "did not participate." Send an email to all those who participated in one or more programs and activities in the season and ask them to go online to compete the evaluation.

Here are examples of evaluation questions that can be used to construct an evaluation form or a survey instrument. For a survey, try to limit the number of essay questions. People prefer the multiple choice/rating scales.

Sample Reaction Questions

How do participants react to the program, or better, what is the measure of their satisfaction?

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

2. I was pleased by/with . . .

3. I was disappointed by/with . . .

4. One thing I found most helpful in this program/activity . . .

5. One of the biggest benefits from participating in this program/activity was . . .

6. This program/activity was . . . very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful, not at all helpful.

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

8. Circle the number that best represents your evaluation of the program/ activity. Use a rating scale of 1—strongly disagree, 2—disagree, 3—agree, and 4—strongly agree *or* a rating scale of: 1—not satisfied, 2—somewhat satisfied, 3—satisfied, 4—very satisfied, and 5—extremely satisfied.

    • I feel that I will be able to use what I learned.
    • The program/activity was interesting and engaging.
    • The program/activity encouraged participation, questions, and practical application.
    • The schedule and length of the program was appropriate.
    • The program/activity respected my learning style.

- The program/activity offered a variety of learning activities and a variety of ways to learn.
- The program/activity helped me apply my learning to daily life.
- (Add specific features and content of the program/activity for people to evaluate.)

Sample Application Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

Planning Step 12:
Design the New Season of Adult Faith Formation Programming

Using the ideas you have already generated the first time through the design process, the results from the evaluation, and the recommendations for improvement, design the new season of programming beginning at step 6: Design a Season of Adult Faith Formation Programming.

Works Cited

Krug, Steve. *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* (Third Edition). Berkeley: New Riders, 2014.

Worksheets

All of the worksheets in this chapter can be found online in MS Word files for easy use: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

Seasons of Adult Faith Formation Website

www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com

The **SeasonsofAdultFaith.com** website provides a variety of resources to assist leaders in developing adult faith formation. This online resource center includes: programming ideas, articles on adult faith formation programming, case studies and examples of adult faith formation programming, links to digital resources to use in adult programming, and reproducible materials and worksheets from *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* book.

The following websites, developed by Lifelong Faith, will also be helpful in developing adult faith formation in your congregation:

21st Century Faith Formation Website (www.21stcenturyfaith formation.com) helps leaders design faith formation guided by the vision and practices in *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*. This is a "how-to" resource with lots of practical tools to apply the concepts in the book including: curriculum models and strategies for faith formation with age groups, families, and all generations; tools and worksheets for designing faith formation curriculum; website design tools; congregational case studies; and digital media methods and interactive tools.

Curating Faith Formation Website (www.curatingfaithformation. com) provides links to digital content to use in designing curriculum and building a faith formation website for children, adolescents, adults, families, and all generations.

Intergenerational Faith Website (www.intergenerationalfaith.com) provides research on intergenerational religious transmission and faith formation, articles on the principles and practices of intergenerational faith formation and ministry, case studies, and book resources.

Lifelong Faith Website (www.lifelongfaith.com) is the main website for information and news about LifelongFaith Associates. All of the Lifelong Faith journals are available online for download. Join the mailing list by visiting the website.

Faith Formation Learning Exchange (Sponsored by Vibrant Faith) (www.faithformationlearningexchange.net) provides a variety of resources—research studies, effective practices, cutting-edge thinking, real-world models and tools, and the latest resources—to help leaders develop Christian lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations.

Reimaging Faith Formation for the 21st Century

John Roberto
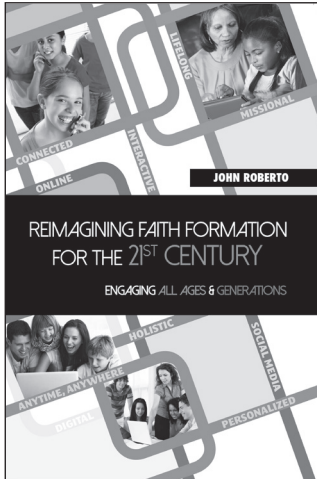
Reimagining Faith Formation is a proposal for what twenty-first century faith formation can look like. Much has been written about the challenges facing Christianity and faith formation. This book seeks to provide a way forward. How can we address the big adaptive challenges facing churches and faith formation? How can we reimagine faith formation with a vision that honors the past and is open to the future? How can we build a new faith-forming ecosystem that supports religious transmission and faith growth? How can we design new models with the best understandings and practices of learning and faith formation? And how can we engage all ages and generations in growing in faith and discipleship for a lifetime?

Kindle version available at Amazon.com.

$20 per book / Quantity Discounts
(Published in 2015)

Chapter One explores four big adaptive challenges facing churches and faith formation to identify the need for a new faith-forming ecosystem and new models of faith formation.

Chapter Two presents a reimagined faith formation ecosystem for the twenty-first century incorporating five, essential, interconnected components: intergenerational faith formation in the congregation, age-group and generational faith formation in a variety of physical places and online spaces, family faith formation at home, missional faith formation to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated, and online and digital faith formation.

Chapter Three presents a reimagined model of faith formation as a *network* of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces that is *lifelong* and *life-wide*—everywhere, anytime learning within a network of mentors, teachers, family, and peers.

Chapter Four presents a reimagined understanding of faith formation curriculum that is holistic, comprehensive and balanced, systemic, lifelong, contextual, digitally enabled, connected, and multi-platform.

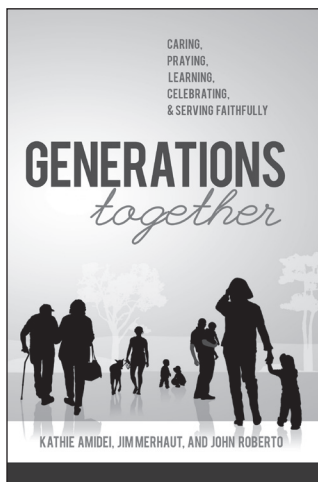**Chapter Five** reimagines the role of faith formation leader as *curator*.

Generations Together
Caring, Praying, Learning, Celebrating, & Serving Faithfully

Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto

Faith is transmitted from generation to generation in extended families and intergenerational congregations. Every congregation can discover its intergenerational heart and soul, and become an intentionally intergenerational community that nurtures the faith of all ages and equips them for living as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.

Generations Together presents the vision of a congregation that is becoming more intentionally intergenerational through its congregational life of *caring, celebrating, learning, prayer,* and serving. *Generations Together* guides leaders in learning what this vision looks like in practice and how to guide a congregation in envisioning and designing projects and initiative to become more intentionally intergenerational.

Kindle version available at Amazon.com.

$20 per book / Quantity Discounts
(Published in 2014)

Chapter 1. A Vision of an Intergenerational Church

Chapter 2. Faith Development from Generation to Generation

Chapter 3. The Journey to Intergenerationality: One Church's Story

Chapter 4. Outcomes and Practices of Intergenerational Faith Formation

Chapter 5. A Toolkit for Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational

Chapter 6. Intergenerational Faith Formation for People with Disabilities
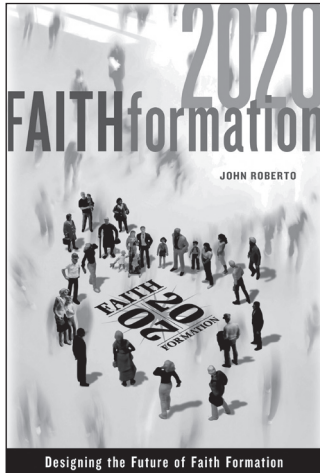
Chapter 7. Leadership for an Intergenerational Church

A Lifelong Faith Publication

Available from the Lifelong Faith Store at:
www.lifelongfaith.com/store/c1/Featured_Products.html

Faith Formation 2020
Designing the Future of Faith Formation

John Roberto

Kindle version available at Amazon.com.

$15 per book / Quantity Discounts
(Published in 2010)

How can Christian congregations provide vibrant faith formation to address the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations in the twenty-first century? How can churches envision the shape of faith formation in the year 2020 and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

Churches across the United States are facing significant challenges in their efforts to provide vibrant faith formation for all ages and generations. The new environment in which Christian faith formation operates will demand new thinking and new models, practices, resources, and technologies to address the spiritual needs of all generations.

Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation guides churches in imagining new directions for faith formation and engages leaders in designing faith formation for the second decade of the twenty-first century. The book presents four scenarios for envisioning the future of faith formation with 1) people of vibrant faith and active engagement in the church community, 2) people who participate occasionally but are not actively engaged or spiritually committed, 3) people who are spiritual but not religious, and 4) people who are uninterested in the spiritual life and unaffiliated with religion.

The book offers practical strategies, ideas, innovations, and resources for targeting the spiritual and religious needs of people in all four scenarios.

A Lifelong Faith Publication

Available from the Lifelong Faith Store at:
www.lifelongfaith.com/store/c1/Featured_Products.html