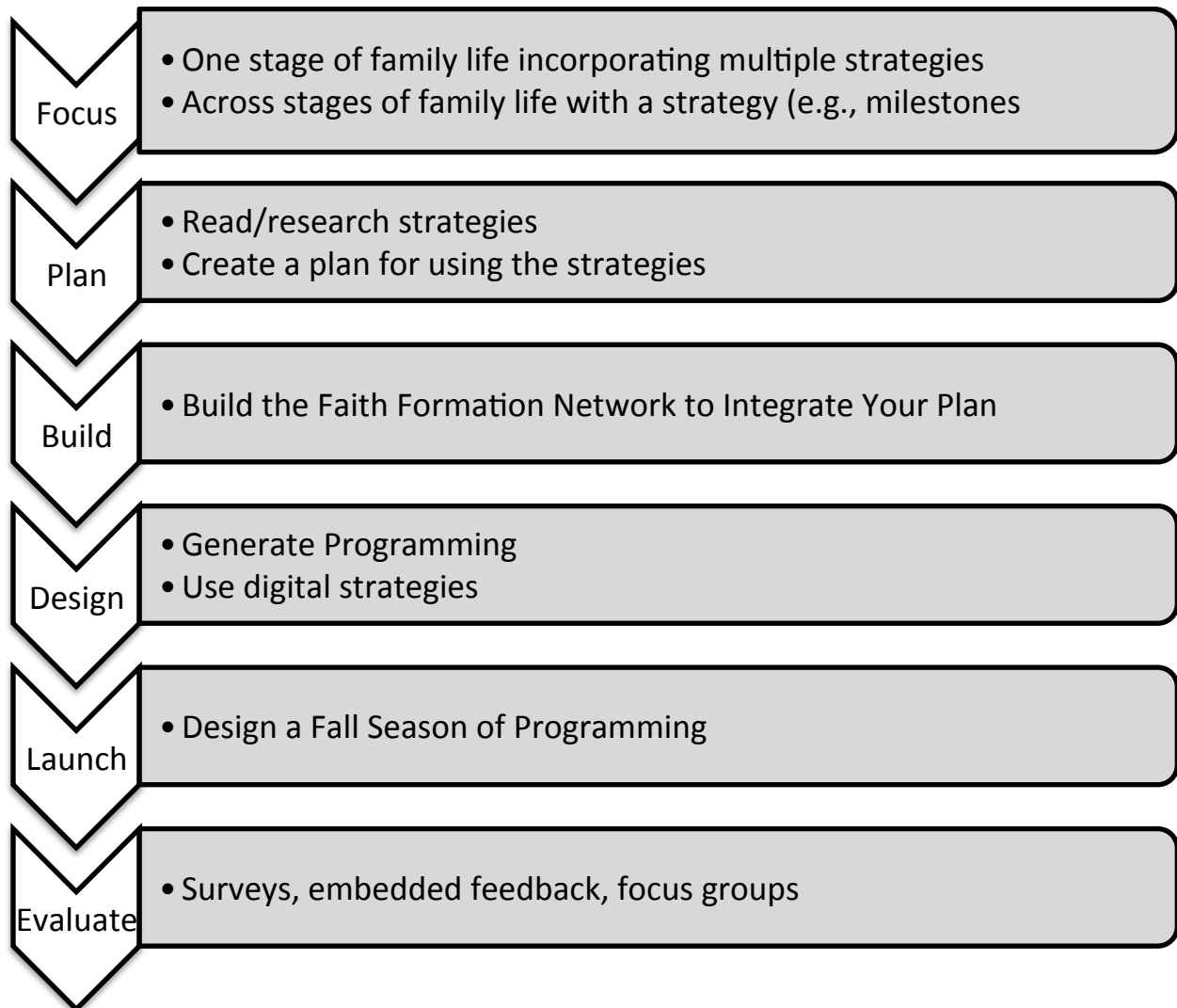


Designing Family Faith Formation

(See Chapter 7 in *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*)

Design Process



Design Steps

Build the Family Faith Formation Network Design

Begin building the family 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 family life issues and parent issues. 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. See the diagram earlier in this chapter.

Planning Step 5: Generate Programming for the Network

Begin generating programming by reviewing the eight strategies in Chapter Six before you begin planning new ideas. How many of these strategies will you incorporate in your network plan? What ideas can you incorporate in your network plan from these eight Strategies?

1. Discovering God in Everyday Life
2. Forming Faith at Home through the Life Cycle
3. Forming Faith through Milestones
4. Celebrating Seasonal Events through the Year
5. Encountering God in the Bible through the Year
6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally
7. Developing a Strong Family Life
8. Empowering Parents and Grandparents

Generate a list of all the possible programs, activities, and resources that *could* be included in the network.

1. Correlate the most important needs from the research into the appropriate content areas of the network design you have just created.
2. Add programs that will continue to be offered for parents and/or families into the appropriate content areas of the network.
3. Add events, ministries, and programs from the intergenerational faith community into the appropriate content areas of the network.

Generate ideas for new programming for each content area.

- * Be sure to utilize a variety of *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.

Use the template below to compile a report of the results. This report presents all of the ideas you can use to design seasonal plans for January–April, May–August, and September–December.

Family Network Programming

Network content areas	Current programming	Intergenerational events	New program ideas

Design a Season of Family 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 a year and completing updating your website three times a year with the new programming as well as recurring programming. For an example of a season of a family faith formation network go to: <http://holytrinityfamilies.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 form (after the planning steps) to record the information to get an overall view of the season.

1. Identify the season: January 1–May 1 or May 1–September 1 or September 1–January 1.
2. Add continuing 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.

3. Add intergenerational events and programs to the seasonal plan.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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 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.

7. Develop *faith formation playlists*. This is similar to a music playlist where we curate and gather our favorite songs into our own “albums” for listening. A faith formation playlist curates content around a theme into an integrated learning plan that provides a variety of programming and a variety ways to learn.
8. Develop specific plans for each program (when needed): date or month, programming environment(s), digital strategy(s), resources, leaders, and cost.

Seasonal Plan

Network Content Area	Programming & Dates			
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4

Build the Digital Platform for Family Faith Formation

This digital platform provides the primary way to connect parents and families to the network’s offerings and to connect parents and families 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).

1. Choose a domain name (URL) for the family 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://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com>.
2. 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.
3. 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. 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. In the new mobile-responsive designs it might be better to have a “home page” for each content area, which introduces all of the experiences, programs, activities, and resources for that content area and has buttons or links to individual pages with the content. It is harder to view and select submenus on mobile devices. It’s much easier to navigate from a “home page” with links.

4. 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 major content area can be constructed as a *playlist* that provides an integrated plan with a variety of media..
5. Design the website specifically for parents and families 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 people’s 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 parents and families. Highlight the relationship between the content and the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of parents and families. Describe the two to three benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation.

Test the Seasonal Plan and Web Design

Begin by identifying parents 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?” “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.

Programming

Programming Guides

1. A **variety** of relationships, content, experiences, and resources
2. New **methods**: immersive, multimedia, multi-sensory, highly visual, participatory, experiential
3. New **formats**: episodic engagements and experiences, micro-learning, on demand, mobile, 24x7
4. New **digital** media and digital platforms; connect with parents/families through social media; redesign programming with digital connections and extensions; address new needs through online experiences
5. **Multiple environments**: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.
6. **Multiple versions**: design a program once and offer it in multiple formats and environments, e.g., a gathered program that is recorded and can be used for individual study or small group study

Life Cycle Specific Approach

	At Home	With Families	Intergenerational	At Church
Caring relationships				
Celebrating the liturgical seasons				
Celebrating milestones				
Learning the Christian tradition				
Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation				
Reading and studying the Bible				
Serving and justice				
Worshipping God				
Family Life Development				
Parenting Formation				

Multiple Stages of Family Life Approach

Examples: 1) Forming faith through milestones, 2) Reading the Bible & Encountering God in the Bible

Church-Based Family-Intergenerational Programming Approach

Examples: Learning programs; Seasonal workshops; Family life workshops; Service programs

Parent (Grandparent) Formation Approach

Content: Parenting competencies and skills; faith growth of parents; faith forming skills of parents

Program Ideas: A progression of workshops, webinars, and/or courses for each stage of the lifecycle; laboratory experiences—immersion/hands-on experiences; parent mentors; lifecycle support groups for parents; parent catechumenate—around key milestone experiences and “moments of return”

Digitally-Enabled & Digitally Connected Approaches

Fully Online	Mostly Online	Online and Gathered	Gathered and 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 <i>combined with</i> 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