



# Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

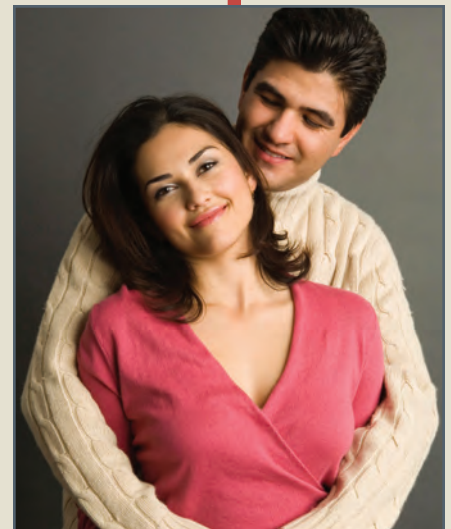
Volume 8.2

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Winter 20115



## TRENDS & DEVELOPMENTS IN FAITH FORMATION



# Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

## **Winter – Volume 8.2** **Faith Formation Practices & Approaches**

**John Roberto, Editor**

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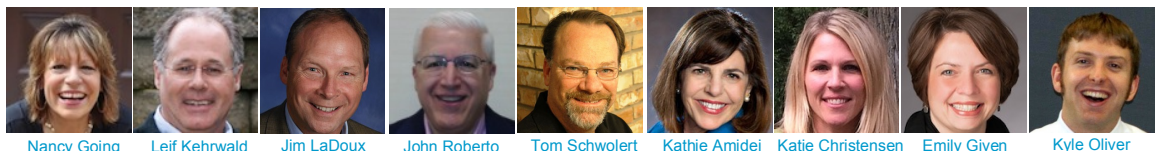
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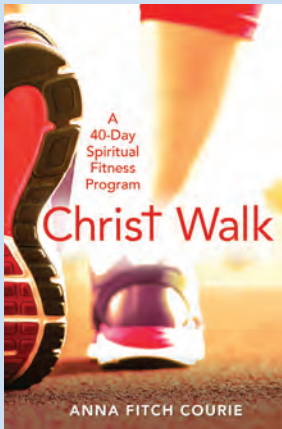
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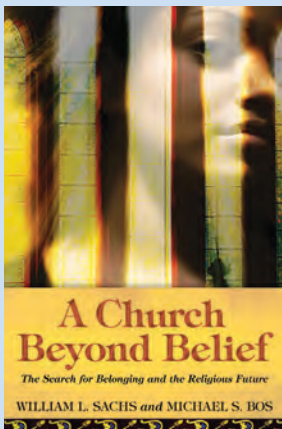
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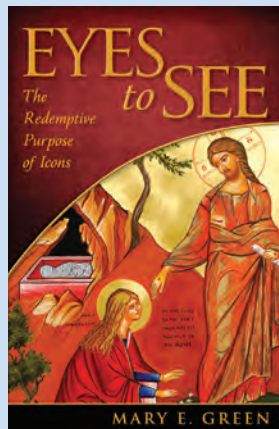
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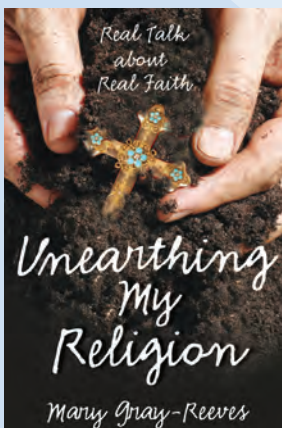
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## Forming Faith @ Home

Leif Kehrwald

**W**hile the research is clear about what families and households ought to do to grow in faith at home, church leaders are befuddled that families often don't do the faith-forming activities that are sent home from worship, Sunday School, Confirmation class, Adult Bible Study, and the like. Still, some households do engage in faith practice and it makes a positive difference in their lives. What are these families willing to do? How can church leaders empower them? The research shows what they ought to do, but recent analysis of activity on the website [Vibrant Faith @ Home](#) is beginning to show what they are willing to do. Where the two overlap—ought + willing—is the sweet spot of family faith and religious practice. Through an analysis of this web activity, I offer a number of characteristics of faith forming activities that will actually get used at home.

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**Leif Kehrwald** served as General Editor for Vibrant Faith @ Home, and is now Training Services Coordinator for Vibrant Faith. Leif has worked in family ministry and faith formation on the local, regional, and national levels for more than thirty years. He has published several books and numerous articles on family life, family ministry, marriage, and youth ministry, and edited *The Catholic Faith and Family Bible* (HarperCollins). Contact Leif at [lkehrwald@vibrantfaith.org](mailto:lkehrwald@vibrantfaith.org).

Amid the frenetic pace and pressure of family and household life in the United States today, ministry leaders are understandably befuddled on how to motivate and empower families to engage in faith practice at home. Even among the most committed families there is often a lack of intentional faith expression at home. The daily pressures and stresses facing families today are surely a contributing factor. If you've been in ministry longer than ten minutes, you are surely aware of these challenges. I won't mention them all here, but one is worth noting.

## Time

Today's American family is bombarded with external pressures and internal expectations. Demands on their time are extraordinary and unprecedented, and expectations for how to function together in harmony are unrealistic. Amid their efforts to negotiate working relationships with our fast-paced, hyper-communication, instant-gratification, media-technology addicted, market-driven culture, family members big and small, young and old, scramble each day with finding enough time to "get it all done."

In this pressurized arena, if faith and religious practice are viewed as just another set of "shoulds" in their lives, then it will surely trundle down the priority list and languish near the bottom. But, as you have certainly seen in some families, if their faith practice is viewed as an *essential tool for living*, a go-to set of strategies that helps them navigate those external pressures and internal expectations, then they can't get by without them, and they are always hungry for more and new ideas.

When it comes to the challenges of time, we need to show families how their faith and religious practice can shift from a set of "shoulds" to a set of *key tools* that help them navigate their frenetic and often fragmented household lives. Let's see how that happens.

## Pressure Moments

In their Family Assets research, The Search Institute has identified five key qualities that help all kinds of families be strong. When families have more of these research-based assets, the teens and adults in the family do better in life. These key assets are:

1. *Nurturing Relationships* which includes positive communication, affection, emotional openness, support for individual talents and interests.
2. *Establishing Routines* which includes family meals, shared activities, meaningful traditions, and dependability.
3. *Maintaining Expectations* which includes openness to tough topics, fair rules, defined boundaries, clear expectations, contribution to family.
4. *Adapting to Challenges* which includes management of daily commitments, adaptability, problem solving, and democratic decision making.
5. *Connecting to Community* which includes neighborhood cohesion, relationships with others, enriching activities, and supportive resources.

The more of these assets the family has the healthier they are. With these assets they function better and they like each other better.

With these assets they are able to intentionalize the pressure moments in their day. These are the moments that if they go well, the family functions well. If these moments go poorly, it often results in strife, conflict, and in due course, dysfunction at home.

- ◆ *Exits and entries.* Leave-taking in the morning and returning home in the evening.
- ◆ *Mealtime.* The whole process of preparing, sharing, clearing, and cleaning.

- ◆ *Bedtime.* The rituals and patterns of bringing the day to an end—and not just for families with young children.
- ◆ *Car time.* Time spent together (or not) while commuting to/from school, work, activities, and events.
- ◆ *Dealing with change.* Even though confronted with change regularly, families tend to resist it because it can upset their patterns and routines.

Thinking about the families/households you serve, what additional key moments would you identify?

These are moments that make or break the day for many households. If they are equipped with the assets mentioned above, they are more likely to succeed with the pressure moments, and they are more likely to develop habits and patterns that lead to overall health and well-being as a family.

Now, think about these assets and moments from a faith perspective. What if families had simple faith-forming activities that helped them navigate exits and entries, mealtime, bedtime, car time, and other pressure moments? What if they had faith-forming activities that helped them develop and nurture the family assets? When they experience a faith-forming activity that helps them function better and grow closer to each other, they *will* make it a priority and they *will* want more. In effect, they have made the shift from “should” to “key tool” that they can’t live without.

It’s not uncommon for faith formation leaders to develop or curate home activities that reinforce and extend the faith formation curriculum covered in Sunday School, Confirmation Class, seasonal programming during Advent and Lent, and the like. Good strategy. But what if those home activities were also anchored in pressure moments and family assets as described above? As you consider home activities for your gathered programming, think strategically about *when* you envision them doing the activity, and design it in such a way that they can intentionalize a pressure moment.

## Parents and Adults

Perhaps the most important and most self-evident conclusion from the body of research over the last five decades is the fact that parents and adults have primary influence on faith and religious practice in the home. Study after study has come to similar conclusions to that of Christian Smith and his colleagues in their National Studies on Youth and Religion in that all of their findings point to the essential role of parents and the family in nurturing faith growth in the first third of life.

No news there. Still, two conclusions from Vern Bengtson’s book *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations* are worth mentioning.

First, Bengtson’s research showed that parental influence lies with the *quality* of the relationship between parent and child. Faith is more effectively transmitted to the next generation when the parent-child relationship is categorized as warm, accepting, compassionate, and open to questions rather than the opposite of those characteristics. Second, Bengtson’s research showed that faith is transmitted when parents genuinely live their faith and it makes an authentic difference in their lives. In effect, they model to their children what it means to be an adult faith practitioner. (Bengtson 196)

Parents are not so much the teachers of the content of the faith as they are key role models of how one grows up to live the faith as an ordinary person in the real world.

Children and youth are not disillusioned when a parent or adult doesn’t have a ready answer to their faith question, especially if there is a willingness to explore the question together. Yet they quickly become disillusioned if they perceive a lack of genuineness or meaning in the faith of the parent or adult. And their perception powers are extraordinary! Well before the onset of adolescence, children are able to determine if their parents’ faith is truly genuine or if they are just going through the motions for their sake.

Ironically (and perhaps unfortunately, much of what parishes and congregations do in faith formation is for the sake of children and youth. I fear this posture only perpetuates the same attitude among parents and adults at home—we're doing it for the children. When, in fact, the best thing for the children is for the adults to be doing it for themselves.

## What They Ought to Do

With parents and adults as primary influencers, at Vibrant Faith we have identified six key types of activities that make a difference. We believe families grow in faith when they:

- ◆ **Talk** with each other about their faith. They share their questions, opinions, and wonderments with each other; not a formal teaching time, but genuine age-appropriate conversation.
- ◆ **Pray together** in ways that are comfortable and comforting. They find ways to pray that work for them, and they seek out prayer resources to assist them.
- ◆ **Ritualize** their important moments. They recognize key moments in the day, the week, the season, and the year; and celebrate/commiserate over them appropriately. They also celebrate their milestone moments that change them forever.
- ◆ **Reach out in service** and support of others. They engage in works of mercy and works of justice for the sake the less fortunate.
- ◆ **Share Bible stories** in ways that connect with family stories. They dive into the narratives of Scripture and glean lessons that pertain to their own experiences.
- ◆ **Learn about faith together** in response to their questions and interests. The content of faith beckons them, and so they acknowledge their

faith questions, and seek answers from credible and reliable sources.<sup>1</sup>

In effect, this is what the research reveals as what they *ought* to do to grow in faith at home. Congregational faith formation seldom “takes” until families engage in activities related to these items above. The challenge, of course, is that most families are not doing the six types of activities. For most, it remains a set of “shoulds” that they just don't get to. Why is this so?

## What They're Willing to Do

In March 2012 Vibrant Faith launched a new content rich web site for families called Vibrant Faith @ Home ([www.vibrantfaithathome.org](http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org)). From the start, the goal of this website has been to supports families who are intentional about their faith and religious practice as they raise the next generation of committed Christians. The site is populated with simple, but provocative faith-forming activities, all intended for use at home by families and households of all ages and stages. There are seasonal activities for families with young children, families with teenagers, young adults, adults, couples, and some activities just for children. Some of the activities are available in Spanish. All of the activities are anchored in the research around what families *ought* to do to grow in faith, and each falls into one of the six categories described above: talk, pray, ritualize, serve, read the Bible, or learn.

For nearly three years, we added sixty or more faith-forming activities to the site each season: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Currently, there are more than 600 activities on the site. With the support and advocacy of church leaders, the site has become a popular stop for many families across the country and around the world. Hundreds of thousands of persons and families have found faith-forming activities that help pray together or ritualize a milestone or discuss a faith question or serve someone in need.

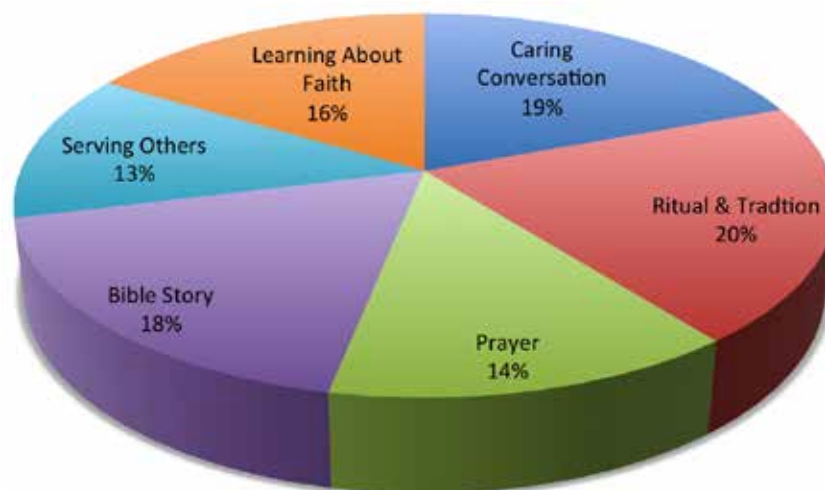
The editorial development process used to select, edit, and publish these activities ensures a consistently high quality across the board. The authors are competent and experienced to address their chosen topics, and each activity is designed specifically for its audience group. Editorial review has been extensive before each activity is posted. Point is, there's a uniform nature to the quality and consistency of all 600+ activities.

Even still, some activities are accessed often and repeatedly, while others are not. Why is this so? The analytics of user activity on the site tell us a host of things about how the site is used, what activities are popular,

what activities are under utilized, etc. For example, the pie chart below shows the percentage of use according to the six categories of activities.

At first glance, one might lament that the percentages of those using “Serving Others” and “Prayer” activities is lower than the other categories. However, the spread across all six categories is relatively even. Or at least one can say each category has viability. So the most important take-away is that people at home are willing to engage in any of the six categories as long as the particular activity engages their interest and meets their needs

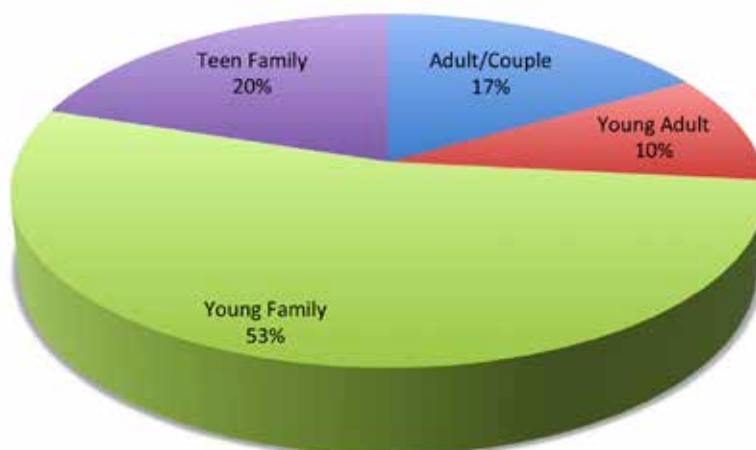
**User Activity by Type of Faith Forming Activity**



Another interesting insight from the analytics can be gleaned from this next chart. It shows how the top 30 activities—the 30

most used activities—organized in terms of audience group.

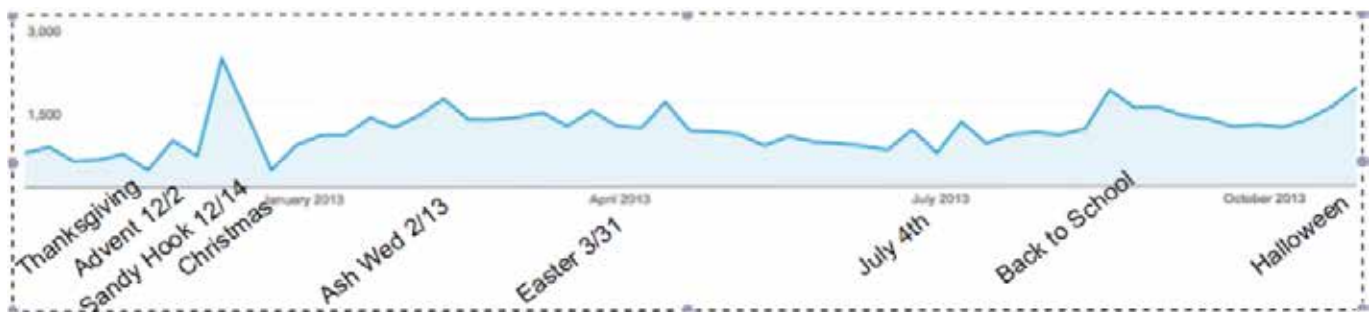
**Top 30 Activities by Audience**



It should be no surprise that activities for young families comprise just over half of the top 30. And again, at first glance one might lament that only 10% of the top 30 activities are for young adults. But think about that for a moment. Our opinion is that it is actually quite significant that there are enough young adults frequenting Vibrant Faith @ Home to drive three of their activities into the top 30 from among 600? Given the challenges and struggles many congregations report in their efforts to reach young adults, at Vibrant Faith we feel fortunate that we are reaching them to this degree.

We have also asked ourselves questions related to *when* people use the activities. The graph below offers some insights.

This graph shows overall visits to the site over a one year period. There are some predictable peaks: Advent, Ash Wednesday, Lent, back to school, Halloween. But there are also some interesting low points such as Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. We have discovered that the site is used heavily in *anticipation* of key family/household events, but not so much on the actual day of the event.



However, there have been a couple major events that no one could have anticipated where activity on the site spiked. When we responded to the tragedies at Sandy Hook Elementary and Boston Marathon with simple, practical ways to deal with these tragedies at home from a faith perspective, people really responded to.

So, the analytics are beginning to show us a few things about what families are actually *willing* to do. Of particular interest has been the top 30 or so activities. What is it about those activities that make them popular? It should be noted that the list of top 30 activities shifts a bit throughout the year. Early in the year several Advent and Christmas season activities rise into the Top 30. Later in spring, there are more Lent and Easter activities that make the grade. And in the fall, back to school activities become popular. That said, there are also a number of activities that remain constant.

So I've studied these top 30 activities, and I've also studied some of the least popular

activities. From this analysis (that I have repeated numerous times, and have therefore studied many more than just 30 activities) I have developed the following list of characteristics of a faith-forming activity that people will actually use at home. When a faith-forming activity contains some of these characteristics it is more likely to be used rather than discarded. This can be a helpful list for church leaders in their efforts to curate and send home activities that are tied to their programming. Listed with each characteristic is at least one top 30 activity from Vibrant Faith @ Home.

### 1. K I S S . . . Keep It Simple & Short

The activity must be easily and quickly understood, and should last no more than ten minutes—with some developmental flexibility. By that I mean ten minutes is an eternity for preschoolers so it needs to be shorter for them, while the time can be stretched for young adults and adults.

**Example:** *One Word Prayers* (Teen Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/one-word-prayers](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/one-word-prayers)) Families make a point of praying together every day—one word at a time.

## 2. Give It Legs

The activity can be designed to do a short bit everyday for a week, or month, or season. Will they do it *every* day? Not likely so don't make them dependent on doing the one prior.

**Example:** *"Top 5" Lists* (Young Adult) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/top-5-lists](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/top-5-lists)) A weeklong activity to help discover and contemplate how God is actively present in our lives, where we struggle with faith and where growth is taking place.

**Example:** *Alleluia Chain* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/alleluia-chain](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/alleluia-chain)) Each day during the Easter season, take time to lift up "Alleluia" moments. Remember these joy-filled moments by creating a paper chain to hang in your home.

## 3. If They Build It . . . They'll Use It

The activity has a creative component that is developmentally appropriate and not too complicated. Caution: don't make them run out and buy supplies. They'll never do it.

**Example:** *Doodling Our Faith Stories* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/doodling-our-faith-stories](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/doodling-our-faith-stories)) Busy families don't always take time to notice how the Spirit is helping them to grow in their relationship with God. By talking, writing, and doodling together, you can learn more about faith from one another.

**Example:** *Alleluia Chain* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/alleluia-chain](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/alleluia-chain)) Each day during the Easter season, take time to lift up "Alleluia" moments. Remember these joy-filled moments by creating a paper chain to hang in your home.

## 4. Season/Event Connected

This may seem obvious, but the seasonal activities in the top 30 aren't just anchored in an event or season, they also effectively harness existing energy and enthusiasm for the season or event in the home.

**Example:** *The Real Patrick* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/the-real-patrick](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/the-real-patrick)) Saint Patrick was a real person, born in Britain in the year 385 C. E. He was once a slave, then ultimately a priest in Ireland. He brought many people to God at a time when many had turned away from the Lord.

**Example:** *A Helping Halloween* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/a-helping-halloween](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/a-helping-halloween)) Costumes. Trick or Treating. Getting candy. These are what children often think about Halloween. Enlarge this holiday so that the month of October becomes more about giving.

## 5. Family Moment Connected

The activity is designed to integrate with key family pressure moments mentioned earlier in this article, such as meal time, bed time, car time, leave-taking, homecoming, etc. Remember, when they intentionalize those moments, they like each other better and they function better as a family.

**Example:** *Lenten Bedtime Prayer* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/Lenten-bedtime-prayer](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/Lenten-bedtime-prayer)) Teach your child(ren) a new prayer (or two) over the course of the 40 days of Lent by taping it by their bed and praying it together every night at bedtime.

## 6. Life Stage Connected

The activity is more than developmentally appropriate, it responds directly to a felt developmental need and helps them manage a developmental change.

**Example:** *Easter Traditions for Teens* (Teen Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/easter-traditions-for-teens](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/easter-traditions-for-teens)) As children become teenagers, they may feel that Easter is a holiday for younger children and/or for people who aren't critical thinkers. Welcome teenagers' questions and invite them to help you develop new ways to celebrate Easter.

**Easter:** *Mumford & the Son* (Young Adult) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/mumford-the-son](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/mumford-the-son)) Many who listen to the popular band Mumford & Sons say they hear themes of faith in their music. Yet, Marcus Mumford, the band's lead singer, rejects the label "Christian." Is Mumford & Sons "Christian" music? Listen for yourself.

## 7. Learn Something New

The activity offers religious information that is compelling, honors learning styles, connects to family living, and connects to deeper issues of life, death, deep meaning. They really do want to learn about faith when these connections are made.

**Example:** *Advent: A Time of Waiting* (Teen Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/advent-a-time-of-waiting](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/advent-a-time-of-waiting)) The four weeks before Christmas is known as the season of Advent in the church. It's a time of waiting and preparation. As a family, talk about how to wait well.

**Example:** *Trinity Sunday* (Teen Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/trinity-sunday](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/trinity-sunday)) Learn more about Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost and how it impacts your faith.

## 8. Model in Gathered Setting.

The activities are more likely to be done at home when modeled in the gathered setting. Many congregations use vibrant Faith @ Home activities (slightly adapted) for inter-generational faith learning at church. Then they send folks home with similar activities to

do on their own. These two activities are in the top 30 as a result of this strategy.

**Example:** *Worry Knot* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/worry-knot](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/worry-knot)) What does your family worry about most? By exploring Matthew 6:25-34 your family will explore what God has to say about worry. Make a knotted rope to replace worry with prayer.

**Example:** *Resurrection Faith & Doubt* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/resurrection-faith-and-doubt](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/resurrection-faith-and-doubt)) Each of the Gospels tells about Jesus' friends who found the empty tomb on Easter morning. The story of Jesus' resurrection doesn't end there. Read about Thomas, who had trouble believing that God really raised Jesus from death.

## 9. Depth.

Whether for head, heart, or hands, the activity takes users to a deeper level of growth. Even though the activity is short, it is designed to get to the issue quickly and go as deep as possible.

**Example:** *Gifts from God Inventory* (Young Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/gifts-from-god-inventory](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/gifts-from-god-inventory)) We are all given many gifts from God! By identifying what they are, we can use our gifts to enrich our lives and the lives of others. Take a personal inventory to discover your God-given gifts and share your findings with your family.

**Example:** *3 Scary, Holy, Sad Days* (Adult/Couple) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/3-scary-holy-sad-days](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/3-scary-holy-sad-days)) Most everyone in America is familiar with Halloween and "trick or treating." But Halloween is just the first of three days that are related to each other. One is scary, one is holy, and one is sad. Do you know which is which and why?

## 10. Hits Home

The activity is more than just relevant, it touches heart and soul with just the right thing at the right moment. This factor has more to do with timing than content. When a major event occurs and families have just the right way to process it, that's when it hits home.

**Example:** *Standing Up for Others* (Teen Family) ([vibrantfaithathome.org/item/standing-up-for-others](http://vibrantfaithathome.org/item/standing-up-for-others)) Many holidays throughout the year emphasize justice and standing up for others. From Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January to the United Nations' World Day of Social Justice on February 20, identify ways that you can stand up for others in ways that fit you best.

Use this list of characteristics as a filter or lens through which you view and analyze the faith forming activities you pass along to families. Then don't be surprised when you see that they actually get used.

No matter how busy and stressed they are, if families perceive that certain faith practices can help them function better and grow closer as a family, they are quite willing to give them a try. When the activities are anchored in the research then they are more likely to produce genuine and last faith growth. And finally, when the activities contain one or more of the ten characteristics mentioned above, then the analytics tell us these activities are more likely to be used.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> These six categories of activities form the conceptual backbone for Vibrant Faith @ Home ([www.vibrantfaithathome.org](http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org)), a content rich website with over 600 faith-forming activities for families and households of all ages and stages. We identified the six categories as a result of our careful reading of research on families and faith.

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## A Sea Change for Elderly Churches

Craig Mitchell

It's a hot Australian summer's day. People are heading to or from the beach, buying ice creams or fish and chips. On the lawn outside the church are a number of small tents where passers-by can stop, reflect and express their hopes and prayers for the year ahead. This colorful installation engages both locals and tourists to find space for contemplation.

Queenscliff Uniting Church<sup>1</sup> is right on the main street of a retirement and tourism community on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria, Australia, only a block from the esplanade. After seven years of faithfully serving two elderly congregations, the two ministers, Kerrie Lingham and Charles Gallacher (both working half-time) knew that something had to change. Following much debate, the congregations at Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale moved from each having a Sunday morning worship service to one service that alternates for three months at each site. This freed up both the ministers and the congregations. The result was a Wednesday evening community meal followed by a contemplative Eucharist. Thus a new beginning took place.

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The life of these two churches is shaped around the practices of hospitality, spirituality, creative arts, and social justice. In *Faith Formation 2020*, John Roberto invited churches to consider four different scenarios for faith formation. The particular challenge for Kerrie and Charles was how to help core members explore faith with fresh eyes, how to engage local older adults who were “spiritual but not religious” and how to engage tourist families with children

This community is one of 21 Australian churches that I visited as part of a national study of the future of Christian Education for the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA).<sup>2</sup> The study included a literature review, interviews with leaders of 21 churches across Australia and a group consultation with denominational leaders in each state. In the 21 churches, large and small, urban and rural, from Darwin to Hobart to Bunbury to Clare, I interviewed one or two key leaders about their perceptions of their church’s approach to faith formation and education.

My research took places through three ‘lenses’ which reflected both current concerns and future possibilities:

1. **Congregations as lifelong learning communities of discipleship for the sake of the mission of God.** What does it look like when a the whole faith community values learning together and has intentional strategies for growing disciples?
2. **Church leaders who are effective educational leaders, capable of guiding a community in forming disciples.** What does it look like when ministry leaders are intentional about building the learning capacity of their congregations? (This is not so much about the minister or leader being a great teacher, but more like them being a school principal whose role is to foster excellence in every learning setting.)

3. **Congregations developing a culture of learning for and from engagement in mission: mission-shaping discipleship.** What does it look like when a church’s mission activity is both a source and a goal of faith formation?

What if the challenge of (re)forming Christian formation and learning for today is a core part of being the people of God and a core task of its leaders?

Every church has a story to tell. My aim was not to find one new, perfect model of formation and education, but to find a number of common threads across the 21 narratives. What can we learn from the church in Queenscliff, Point Lonsdale?

## Faith Practices: Exploring Spirituality

The weekly Wednesday evening liturgy at Queenscliff is peaceful, reflective and full of symbols, allowing people from any faith background or none to engage in their own ways. Yet the worship is not insular. On the evening when I visit, there are several prayer stations around the room where people can reflect on a current issue, in this case indigenous people and their struggle for identity and equality. Prayer activities are ‘hands-on’ with Scripture, prayers and art materials. The communion table is a large circular mosaic being created over several weeks as people place colored glass shapes into a frame. Seven days a week, the church is open so that any visitor to the church can spend time at such stations to meditate and pray. Like the summer holiday tents on the lawn, this is a regular, free invitation to be attentive to the presence of God’s Spirit. The ministers also host regular quiet retreat days and the church website offers resources for contemplation and prayer. Visual symbols and artwork feature prominently in these practices.

For retirees, some of whom feel they have 'heard it all before,' and some of whom are open to a new way of being, this approach is more about experience than explication. However the ministers' also host a book-reading group for those who want to go deeper, reading everything from post-modern theology to the Rule of St Benedict. According to Kerrie, "We are both passionate readers and explorers of 'mission culture' and how to think about God and how to think about theology in this contemporary world." Over lunch conversation, a group of church members emphasize to me that they on a journey of mutual discovery with their ministers who are learning just as much as they are through these interactions. The ministers are frank about their own faith questions, doubts and discoveries.

Etienne Wenger is a leading thinker about what it means to be a learning community. For him, learning and growing is all about who we are, where we are, and how we live. Learning is always social and situational—communal and contextual. Wenger speaks about four dimensions of social and situated learning—how we learn by being part of a particular community in a particular place.

1. Community (learning as *belonging*)
2. Identity (learning as *becoming*)
3. Meaning (learning as *experience*)
4. Practice (learning as *doing*)

Learning doesn't only happen through programs but through the whole of our participation in the life of the faith community. But this doesn't mean that the life of a faith community is simply laissez-faire or chaotic. Rather it means that intentionality about a community's relationships and habits is essential. By changing our shared habits, we grow differently together. We start to become changed people even before we know it. We learn in ways that go beyond words and explanation, and make discoveries through new actions.

In other words, the praxis of Christian discipleship in community is at the heart of growing as the people of God. For Charles and Kerrie, fresh ways of being and speaking go together. Rather than expecting change through teaching alone, they provide opportunity for fresh experiences, both episodic (quiet days every three months) and sustained (the book group). The leaders' transparency regarding their own questions and growth is a model of 'learning as becoming' and also an invitation to a shared community journey.

Kerrie: "I suspect that learning for me is transformation, and I suspect that happens when people actually have an experience... I think the depth of our connection with the people in the congregation and with each other in the congregation, because we spend so much time together, is enabling a deeper conversation around faith issues as well."

## Faith Practices: Hospitality

... the catechetical culture that nurtures and sustains a faith-forming education is not predominantly an institutional or ideological reality as much as it is a relational dynamic. Hospitable places for its practices of teaching and learning must be created. Times must be chosen. The relationships have to be nurtured. (Foster, 9)

The Wednesday evening meal is a buzz of conversation. There is a roster for cooking and a local winemaker brings bottles of red. Community flows into communion. "We try not to use the word congregation much anymore, but seeing ourselves as a community, and it's not a community that has this is 'us' that are in and that's 'them' that are out. You don't belong because you go to worship; you belong because you're participating in something that's part of our life together. So we've got probably seventy

people involved in Op Shop (second hand store) – some of those people connecting to the worship life after a while, but not necessarily. We support rural Australians for refugees. A lot of artists that are in the community will be at the church doing various things. I just wanted a mosaic of groups and I guess our job is trying to weave the sense of spirituality through it all. But it's not about them coming to us. We're trying to actually take ways of encountering God to those different groups, wherever they might be physically or spiritually. Worship's not the centre."

"It is a seven day a week community centre," says Charles. The church hall had been expanded and refurbished as a hospitality space with an improved kitchen. A part-time Community Development Coordinator is focused on developing the premises as a hub for the local community of Queenscliff to gather. "Kirk's Place" has been created at one end of the premises – a community space for coffee, and conversation meditation with an 'old time' feel. This month they are hosting 'art for contentment' workshops.

The kitchen is at the center of this refurbished hospitality space. Kerrie says "It's kind of been about building relationships and seeing where it'll take us, rather than having a goal of where it'll take us. So we have an agenda, we just build relationships and a culture of hospitality has been important. We eat together a lot, we're always cooking!" It is clear that Kerrie is the extroverted, 'bubbly' hostess, while Charles is the quieter, more reflective type. Together they make a great ministry team, creating times and spaces for both formal and informal interaction and reflection. Hospitality creates conversation spaces.

## Faith Practices: Creative Arts

The main street location makes the Queenscliff church ideal for music concerts, and the venue is used throughout the year both by church-hosted and community events, including a partnership with the region's annual youth music festival. Artists with broad appeal are invited. Local visual arts groups use the premises as they home base. In 2014, Queenscliff hosted its first "Sacred Edge" Festival of Arts, Music, and Spirituality, with guest speakers, live music, an interactive arts space and a space to explore spirituality through 'mindfulness'. The focus of Sacred Edge is broad, progressive, multi-cultural, and inter-faith – an event for the whole community. Thus creative arts are seen not simply as a means for the church to express a message, but more as a means by which anyone in the community may express, explore and experience spirituality and fullness of life. To return to Roberto's four quadrants, this initiative opens up a hospitable space for those who are open to spirituality but not necessarily interested in the formality of religion, particularly Christianity. By helping create events for the wider community, the church is sponsor rather than censor. They trust that the Christian story can carry its own meaning alongside others.

## Faith Practices: Social Justice

"We are a mission-driven congregation. . . We exist to connect with the wider community, and to be people of justice, and that all of that arises from our spirituality and our sense of the Jesus story," says Kerrie. I use the language of spirituality a lot, and transformation – getting to the core of the story... I'm more explicit I think at times about saying 'Let's worry less about doctrine

and more about living the story'. [This is about] belonging to a community that is wanting to explore and live this story in some depth."

In worship, learning and action, a commitment to social justice, integral to Christian discipleship, is part of the fabric of this faith community. The congregation hosts regular speakers on issues such as care for the environment, support for refugees, and indigenous concerns. They support Rural Australians for Refugees and are open to lending a hand to a range of groups and causes. Needless to say, these activities combine awareness raising and relationship building, yet they also invite change and growth.

Kerrie: "Discipleship arises out of experiences, practicing this community... Then we can talk about the latest thinking on mission, whether it's fresh expressions or any alternative worship or whatever, but that all starts to make sense because people have experienced something different. If you just talk about that in the abstract, without any experience, it's all theory and it just deteriorates into debates."

Charles Foster suggests that there are three kinds of interdependent learning that are vital for Christian faith: *developmental learning*, *practice learning*, and *discovery learning*. He says that churches have built their curriculum programs around the first kind. What is needed is sustained learning from participating in the community's practices, and opportunities for exploratory, transformative learning through discovery. Practice and discovery learning are experiential, requiring regular invitations to new opportunities; not "You go!" but "Let's do this together." By providing experiences that vary in nature and duration, the congregation is opening up multiple ways in which people can engage in formational relationships and activities.

Foster says that practice learning in particular suits a community of varying ages and stages. You can participate in your own way at your own level, yet there are also the saints who will model for you what a more mature expression of generosity or service or compassion might look like. At Queenscliff, anyone can start a social action initiative. Those concerned about the issue, or wanting to learn more, can participate at their own level. Social issue or action based groups tap into people's passion to make a difference in the world. They are different from groups based on age or stage. Long-time activists 'apprentice' others, raising awareness about an issue (such as the environment and eco-ethology), working through questions, modeling ways to take personal and collective action.

Wenger and Lave's earlier work centered on approaches to apprenticeship whereby 'masters' passed on expert knowledge to their apprentices when they deemed them ready to learn. Practice learning arises from living and serving together as disciples. Having a formal role in the organization is of little relevance; expressing the fruit and gifts of the Spirit is what molds disciples and shapes mission. While the Queenscliff churches have an organizational structure (a church council and four ministry teams), their culture is permission-giving. If you have an idea, find the resources, gather a team and get started! An interest-based approach to groups and activities lends itself to people passing on their wisdom to others.

## My Story, Your Story

Charles: "I think everything we do is multi-dimensional too, so we don't do something for spiritual development... or for mission... or for fundraising or something else. We try to build all those elements..., including faith development, into everything we do... So it's always an activity with some opportunities for

building relationships as well as an opportunity for reflection.”

Kerrie: “The wider community know that we’re not a church that says we have all the answers... We have a very open-minded and open-hearted sense of the gospel and the meaning of life... I can talk to people in the wider community about issues of spirituality..., just as easily as I can to people who are there all the time... I know what my story and my journey is, but yours is different... and we can talk about that.”

After a lifetime of working with children and young people and their families, it was eye-opening for me to visit a congregation and community of retirees. For these people in their third ‘third of life,’ spiritual growth is permeated through affinity – shared community and shared interests. They welcome the space and time to contemplate, to create and to act on their concerns for the world. They appreciate ministry leaders who are guides and hosts who will resource their learning, rather than acting as managers or experts. These retirees are grateful for a non-judgmental environment where they can ponder and question.

Across the 21 interviews I observed some similar traits across some of the churches. Here are some that the Queenscliff churches held in common with other congregations.

1. Congregations act as ‘open systems’ of discipleship, regularly bringing in outside people and resources, seeing active connections with the wider church and wider world as vital for nourishing lively faith.
2. Some congregations have shifted focus away from Sunday morning as the primary or sole expression of ‘being church’ in the local community as a catalyst for change and growth.
3. Congregations foster a culture in which faith formation takes place in relational conversation; faith

permeates everyday interactions, whether on church premises, around church activities, in households or community life.

4. Leaders are seen to be learning and growing in their own faith and discipleship and openly sharing this with the faith community in ways that foster a shared journey of faith.
5. Leaders explore and speak of faith beyond traditional language and forms in ways that engage with people both within and beyond congregational life.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unitingqueenscliff.org.au/Queenscliff-Point\\_Lonsdale\\_UCA/Home.html](http://www.unitingqueenscliff.org.au/Queenscliff-Point_Lonsdale_UCA/Home.html)

<sup>2</sup> The Uniting Church was formed in 1977 from Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

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## Video

You can watch excerpts of the interview with Kerrie & Charles at <http://www.fedvideos.org>

## Craig Mitchell’s Social Media

- Craig blogs at <http://www.growing-disciples.org> and [www.fednews.org](http://www.fednews.org)
- Twitter: @UCAChristianEd & @craigmitch
- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/UCAFED>



## Children’s Faith Formation at Church & Home: Birth to Age 5

Jolene Roehlkepartain

It’s easy to focus all of our efforts for children’s faith formation into what happens at church: Christian education for children, children’s church, and other church programs for children. Yet, faith formation happens every day—no matter where children are. We can help children (and their families) grow deeper in their faith whether they’re at church, at home, or somewhere else. In fact, the more we emphasize how faith formation makes up each person’s every day experience, the more children and adults will grow spiritually.

Minneapolis-based Search Institute conducted a landmark study on what is most likely to predict the faith maturity of a person, whether that person is a child, a teenager, or an adult. By surveying more than 11,000 individuals in 561 randomly chosen congregations (Search Institute, 2), Search Institute researchers found two strong factors that predicted the faith maturity of children: 1. Family religiousness and 2. Christian education involvement (Search Institute, 39).

Family religiousness happens no matter where families are. When we focus our efforts on helping families talk about faith and act on their faith, we can build a strong faith formation for children (and their families) while helping them to discover new aspects of faith.

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## Encouraging Faith Practices at Home

How can a family be religious in ways they find attractive? Researchers identified three key factors:

1. Talking to family members about faith or God
2. Having family devotions, and
3. Doing family projects to help others (Search Institute, 46).

Unfortunately, too many families don't feel confident in doing faith practices at home. They think they're not the experts and that faith formation can happen only at church. Part of our job is to show families that they're already doing faith formation at home (and not calling it that) and that they can easily do more.

How are families already doing faith formation? Some families have mealtime and bedtime prayers. Other families answer children's questions about God. Others have religious rituals that have been passed down through the generations, such as going to worship services, lighting Advent candles, reading scripture, helping others in need, and so on.

Distribute the "Emphasizing Faith at Home" worksheet (at the end of the article) to families to help them identify what they're already doing in this area. This worksheet also can help families find other ways to build faith at home.

*Vibrant Faith at Home* provides free, easy-to-do, faith-formation activities for families with children. Some churches download a different activity each week (or once a month) and distributes an activity to each family to do at home. This makes it easy for families to talk about faith and act on their values at home. Vibrant Faith at Home's activities cover six areas:

1. Caring conversations
  2. Ritual and tradition
  3. Prayer
  4. Bible story
  5. Serving others
  6. Learning about faith
- <http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org/library/library-listed-by-audience/library-audience-young-family>

Even when we provide activities, it's important to continue to address the issue that many parents feel uneasy or uncomfortable with their role in helping their children develop spiritually. "We find that many parents within the church fail to speak with their children about moral and spiritual matters and are neglecting to integrate practices into their everyday lives that nurture faith," writes Marcia Bunge, a professor of religion at Gustavus Adolphus College (Bunge, 54). Some churches develop not only children's education courses but also ways for parents to talk about pertinent issues with a children's minister or another member of the clergy. Parents often have good intentions, but many are busy, stressed, and unsure of their role as a "faith educator." The more we can get to know parents and listen to them, the more we can help them create ways to integrate faith more into their everyday home life.

## Linking Church to Home

Part of what makes parents uncomfortable about faith formation at home is that they see it as an "another project" and something else to do. Instead, build on what you're doing at church and create links that extend what you're doing at church to what parents can do at home.

For example, what are you doing with the children during Christian education? Could you provide a couple of questions that parents could ask their children about what happened during Christian education as talking points during their next meal together?

Church holy days also create an ideal way to create connections between church and home. What one small thing could families do during each of the four Sundays of Advent? Create easy ways for families to mark Ash Wednesday, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and other holy days not only at church but also at home. For example, Vibrant Faith offers free activities that link many of the church holy days for families to do at home. Go to “young family” at <http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org/library/library-by-category-col-150/library-category-ritual-and-tradition>.

## Exploring Children’s Questions

For many families, encouraging them to pay attention to the questions that their children ask can open up all kinds of opportunities for faith formation. “Children can be natural philosophers. Much to our amazement, they often ponder big questions. They ask about life and meaning, knowing and knowledge, truth and justice, reality and death,” writes Tobin Hart, psychology professor at the State University of West Georgia. “For many, the spiritual quest is focused and explored through pondering, puzzling over, and playing with such questions” (Hart, 168).

Yet, too often, parents shut these questions down instead of seeing them as invitations to connect more with their children and with faith.

Part of the struggle is that children ask these questions when parents are busy doing something else. Another problem is that parents often don’t know how to respond.

That’s where the church can come in. Some churches have taken on these questions, in fact, encouraged parents and children to ask them and bring them to church. That way parents don’t need to feel pressured to provide the “correct answer” and churches can help families “play” with questions and go deeper into faith issues.

## Getting to Know Families

Nothing will have a greater impact on the link between church and home than taking the time to get to know families. Not just by name. But by finding out who they are, what they love to do, and what they’re struggling with.

“Meaningful conversations are an essential part of a significant relationship,” writes researcher Peter Scales (Scales, 122). Too often we provide activities that grow out of “what we want children and families to learn” rather than also taking into account “who children and families are and what they’re interested in.” Both are critical to not only a successful children’s ministry but also a successful ministry that links faith formation between church and home.

One church discovered that parents were struggling with how to deal with sexuality questions (and the sexual content their kids were stumbling into on the Internet) with their 10 to 12 year old kids. The children’s minister jumped on this issue, creating a one-time class for parents, while the children focused on another issue. The parents asked lots of questions and raised many concerns. The children’s minister asked if the parents wanted a sexuality expert speak to them, and the parents said yes. During that session, parents began whispering to each other. There was a lot of information about sexuality that was new to them. Learning this information within the church gave them more confidence in dealing with these issues when their families were away from church.

Other churches have discovered that families often feel disconnected from their extended families. Many wish grandparents were still alive, healthier, or lived closer. One church linked elderly people with families in their church so they could have “adoptive grandparents.” While some of the relationships didn’t click, many of them did, bringing people together who typically wouldn’t connect.

## Noticing When Families Pull Away

Being intentional about creating ways to do faith formation at church and home won't be effective unless you're paying attention to how engaged families are in your church. What happens when a family starts pulling away? Do you wait and see what happens? Or do you ask—before a family has the chance to drift away?

Most ministers don't like conflict, and most assume that when a family starts to pull away that conflict is the reason. Yet, families slip away from a church for many reasons, and if you're willing to stay connected with them, you can learn a lot by simply asking in a non-threatening way.

"I haven't seen your family at church lately. I miss you." Often a couple of statements like that encourage a family to talk. If they don't want to discuss it, they'll usually dodge the question and change the topic. A family that's pulling away will feel less alone when you ask.

A family's church involvement is much more than about church. It's about what's happening in their family. Maybe someone lost his or her job. Or someone got sick. Or one of the children joined a sport's team that practices during worship. If you already have a relationship with a family, a family will more likely be honest with you about what's going on.

A lot of emphasis in churches these days is placed on church growth. What can get lost during church-growth strategies is keeping tabs on who already comes through your church doors. It's easier to keep a family than to lose one and attract a new one. While it's important to continue attracting new people, it's just as essential to work to keep the families you have engaged and coming.

## Being Relevant in People's Lives

As you link home life with church life for families with children, keep being relevant in people's lives. Continue to follow their interests, their struggles, and make faith formation applicable to their lives. Researchers found these five indicators that described adults who had a mature faith:

1. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet—53%
2. I take time for periods of prayer and meditation—50%
3. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues—50%
4. I talk with other people about my faith—47%
5. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually—45%  
(Search Institute, 11).

An effective children's ministry program pays attention to what's happening not only in children's lives but also the lives of their parents. Many families, for example, struggle with how much time children want to play video games, watch TV, and surf the Internet (all activities that get lumped into a phenomenon that researchers call "screen time"). Some parents feel they're fighting a losing battle and that the church doesn't have much to offer with this issue.

Yet, children's ministers who keep relevant find effective ways to do so. For example, one children's minister found someone in the church who enjoyed reading research studies. That volunteer discovered a study that was pertinent to parents struggling with screen time. The Learning Habit Study of 46,000 homes revealed that families who spend more time doing family activities (such as attending religious worship services together, playing board games, and having family dinners) had kids who spent less time in front of screens, did better in school, were more focused, and

had better social and emotional coping skills (Dobner).

The key is to continue to find ways to link church and home so that children and their parents can see that faith formation impacts every aspect of their lives, whether they're playing soccer, eating dinner, walking the dog, playing with a friend, or going to church. Faith permeates everything. Our role is to help children and their families see that—and live that.

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# Emphasizing Faith at Home

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*It's easy to talk about faith at home—and to act on what you value most. Look at the checklist below. Checkmark which practices you do. Star ones you could try.*

## Prayer

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mealtime prayer
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bedtime prayer
- \_\_\_\_\_ Morning prayer
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prayers for people in the news
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thankful prayers

## Talk about Faith

- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk about what you value and why
- \_\_\_\_\_ Discuss your family's history of faith and church
- \_\_\_\_\_ Name what you're thankful for and why
- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk about which people have made a difference in your faith journey
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify which social justice issues you advocate for and why
- \_\_\_\_\_ Discuss when you've had doubts and why
- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk about how you feel about church today
- \_\_\_\_\_ Discuss why you think faith is important

## Family Devotions

- \_\_\_\_\_ Read the Bible together
- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk about a Bible story together
- \_\_\_\_\_ Memorize scripture
- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk about how your faith impacts how you interpret what's going on in the world
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sing a favorite faith song or hymn together
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read a popular book with faith theme, such as children's books listed at Spirituality & Practice, <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/features.php?id=25197#childrens>

## Family Projects to Help Others

- \_\_\_\_\_ Bake (or buy) something to give to someone who is sick or homebound
- \_\_\_\_\_ Draw pictures to send to grandparents or someone else
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visit someone who is lonely or sick
- \_\_\_\_\_ Help someone who needs a hand, such as raking leaves or shoveling snow
- \_\_\_\_\_ Collect food for a food bank or food shelf



## Lent and Easter with Youth and Young Adults

Shannon Kelly

**L**ent and Easter are very rich times of year for the church and, therefore, are a rich time for teaching and experiencing the faith in a new way. Traditionally, Lent serves as a time of preparation for someone who is to be baptized and it is a time where we intentionally do things that draw us closer to God as we prepare for Easter. These great 40 days of Lent offer us the gift of reconnecting or connecting with God in a new way as we pause, pray, refrain and give.

This time of year is also the time in which teenagers and many young adults have Spring Break, finals, tests, completing last minute applications, finding jobs for the summer, etc. These life events can be both joyous and stress-filled. Lent offers a lens with which one can approach life and can offer a respite in the midst of a busy life. Inviting young people to journey through Lent individually and as a community can make it a very rich, life-giving, and meaningful time.

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**Shannon Kelly's** passion and vocation has focused around ministry to and with children, youth, and families. This passion was formed in the Diocese of Idaho, where she worked at the diocesan camp, assisted with youth programs, and taught children in their Sunday morning formation time. She attended seminary at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and was ordained to the priesthood in 1999. Shannon is currently editing and writing curriculum for *Lesson Plans that Work* for The Episcopal Church, curating the *Lesson Plans that Work* website for the Episcopal Church, and working as a freelance writer and consultant for formation programs.

## Invitation and Getting Real

Think about how you can issue a genuine invitation to observing Lent. If this is something new for your community, you will want to explain what Lent is and what you are inviting people to do in this time of preparation for Easter. If Lent is something that is normally observed in your community, you will still want to do some explanation of how the youth and/or young adults can engage in Lent intentionally as a community. Think about your context and what will make sense, how much explanation you want to offer, and what you are calling them to do during this time.

Lent is an invitation to “get real” about your own life, your life with God, and your life with others. If we look at the Ten Commandments, they are laws or rules given to us by God as a guide for our lives—they outline how we are to treat God, others, and ourselves. Jesus reiterated this in his Great Command, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39) Both of these iterate the importance of how we are connected with God, how we treat others, and how we care for ourselves.

Our culture doesn’t talk much about “sin” but it is a word that we still use in church. So what is sin? Sins are those things that separate us from God and from one another. They are those things that stop us from being who God has truly made us to be. As we invite people to “get real,” how are we inviting them to reconnect with God, one another, and themselves? How are they able to grapple with those things that are separating them from the love God intends for all of us? When we are aware and honest about the separation, disconnect, and sin in our lives, we can work toward connection, love, and forgiveness.

## Lenten Practices

Lent is usually marked with taking time for creating a time to pause and intentionally be with God, prayer, refraining from normal activities (or taking new things on), and giving. These practices are done because they mirror the stories and events we hear about in the Bible and they speak deeply to the life Christ is calling us to live – a life where we stop, pray, refrain, and give.

As you map your Lenten journey and invitation, make sure to have a variety of entry points, activities, and prayer styles so people can enter into the season where they are feeling called. In this article you will find some suggestions to get your creative juices flowing. Where is God calling you on this Lenten Journey? Where is God calling you to invite others?

### Pause

- ◆ **Ash Wednesday.** This is the day Lent begins. It is the ultimate day to pause and mark as a day set aside for reflection, prayer, and a renewed connection with God. On this day we suspend the usual so we can embrace the unusual life God calls us to each day. This day is a day we pause and remember that we are but a part of God’s creation, working with each other and God to participate in what God is calling us to.
- ◆ **Marking Ash Wednesday.** If you can go to an Ash Wednesday service today, go. If you cannot make it because of work, school, or family commitments, then mark Ash Wednesday with family and friends. Gather family or friends together. On a piece of paper, have each person write or draw something that they would like to change, do differently, or something that they would like to take on in their Lenten journey. When each person has had a chance to reflect, invite them to fold up the paper and burn them together in a safe

place. As they are burning, pray together and lift those things to God. You can say the Lord's prayer, a prayer that is meaningful to you, or simply pray for those things you wrote down.

- ◆ **Stillness and Quiet.** This is not the quiet where you get to lay down and fall asleep (even though you could probably use the sleep), but rather intentional quiet where you listen to nothing except what is around you. Quiet practices like meditation and focusing exercises may help, but we invite you to simply be quiet and pay attention to what comes up during this time. What has God called you to notice? What came up?
- ◆ **Modern Holy Week and Easter.** Invite your group to create a modern scenario of what Holy Week and Easter might have looked like if Jesus came today. This will help them understand the story better, put it in their context, and grasp that this is their story, our story, the story of faith.

## Pray

Even though we try to cram as much into each day as we can, we also need and want to pause. We all welcome occasions where we can reflect, think, be still, and pray alone and with friends—and teens are no different. As youth ministers, it is our job to give them tools and resources will allow them the permission and awareness to begin these practices now—practices that will enhance their lives from here forward.

- ◆ **Prayer Box.** If you do not have room for a chain, the prayer box is a great way to gather all your thoughts and prayers into one place. Find a box and cover it with plain paper. Decorate it with symbols of Lent and make sure to cut a hole in the top. Once it is complete, leave it on the table as your centerpiece with a stack of paper next to it. Each time any one has a prayer they can add it to the box and at the end of each week, or at the end of Lent,

you can open the box and share the prayers with each other.

- ◆ **Daily Prayer.** Invite them to take three minutes each day in prayer. This could be first thing in the morning, late a night, or at a specific time during each day.
- ◆ **Read Scripture.** Read a passage of Scripture and then sit with it for a period of time, noticing what words, phrases, or ideas come to you.
- ◆ **Active Prayer and Meditation.** Turn your exercise time into time with God by focusing on God as you walk, run, or bike. Focus on your breath, on the kind of air that surrounds you (hot, cold, crisp, dry, etc.) and give thanks for your breath. Notice what is around you, the creation, the world God made for us, and give thanks for its beauty. What are your surroundings saying to you (is there garbage to be picked up, trails that need to be trimmed, etc.) What is God calling you to do in that time and place?
- ◆ **Online Prayer.** Try new prayer practices and explore new ways of connecting with God and one another. A few suggestions are:
  - Sacred Space: <http://www.sacredspace.ie>
  - Pray as You Go: <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/home>
  - D365: <http://www.d365.org>

## Refrain

A common question people tend to ask in Lent is “What are you giving up this Lent?” This comes from the tradition of Lent being a time of fasting, stripping away all the fat (literal and figurative) in our lives, living a paired down life, and giving something up because Lent is a season of repentance and simplicity.

Refraining from eating meat, drinking, eating fatty foods, etc. are common ways of “refraining” or giving up during Lent.

- ◆ **Giving Up:** Is there something you can give up this Lent that will draw you closer to God or to one another?
- ◆ **Refrain:** Is there a common behavior you want to stop during Lent?

Another way to think about this, which some find helpful, is what is a behavior I want to start during Lent?

- ◆ **Starting:** Is God calling me to do something new?
- ◆ **Connection:** During Lent is there a new way of connecting with God and one another I want to try?

A vastly different way of thinking about “refraining” is refraining from focusing on self-improvement for Lent. What if you spent your Lenten journey really exploring who God has made you to be, what God is calling you to do, who God has put into your life, and be thankful for who you are?

## Give

Another practice of Lent is to give—give money to the poor, give time to projects that will further God’s mission here on earth, give time to the people you love, etc.

- ◆ What do I have to give? Time? Money? Energy? My gifts?
- ◆ Who or what needs your time, money, energy, and gifts?

## 40 Days of Lent Reflections

Lent is a great time to take a few moments every day to prayer and meditation. Wake up early or spend time before bed to reflect on where God is in your life. You can use the 40 days of suggestions below, create your own, or choose one to do each day.

1. **Pause:** What does it mean to be dust?
2. **Pray:** What do you need to ask God in prayer today?

3. **Refrain:** What is one practice I can refrain from today and instead take that time to focus on God on another who needs my attention?
4. **Give:** In what ways am I being called to give to someone else today?
5. **Pause:** Stop. Breathe deeply. Notice where God is in your life.
6. **Pray:** For what are you thankful today?
7. **Refrain:** What can I do differently today?
8. **Give:** What worries can I give over to God today?
9. **Pause:** As you pause and intentionally call God into your life today, where are you led?
10. **Pray:** For whom do you need to pray today?
11. **Refrain:** Give up your usual coffee, tea, soda, afternoon treat and take a walk in your neighborhood. What do you notice?
12. **Give:** What can I give those in need today?
13. **Pause:** Go stand outside. Take a deep breath. What do you notice about God’s creation?
14. **Pray:** What or who are the blessings in your life? Pray for those things.
15. **Refrain:** Refrain from self-doubt, and instead, take notice of the gifts God has given you.
16. **Give:** How can you give of your time today?
17. **Pause:** Read scripture today. What did you hear God saying in that scripture?
18. **Pray:** What are the things you need to confess to God?
19. **Refrain:** Refrain from using social media today. What might you do with that time instead?
20. **Give:** Give yourself time to dream today. What do you dream is next on your journey with God?
21. **Pause:** Before starting your day or before sleep tonight, pause and give thanks.
22. **Pray:** Name the things you are thankful for today.
23. **Refrain:** Refrain from doing the same routine today. What is something new you want to try and do?

24. **Give:** Give yourself an extra 30 minutes to call someone you haven't talked to for a while.
25. **Pause:** Take time today to go for a walk.
26. **Pray:** Who do you feel called to hold in prayer today?
27. **Refrain:** Refrain from rushing today.
28. **Give:** Think of a way to "pay it forward" today.
29. **Pause:** Take time and savor one meal today, eating the food mindfully and with thanks for the food on your plate.
30. **Pray:** Pray for help in letting go of those things that are separating you from another person, from God, or from being truthful to yourself.
31. **Refrain:** Refrain from self-judgment today.
32. **Give:** Give someone the gift of your time or one of your talents. (If you bake, bake for someone else. If you cook, invite someone else to eat with you. If someone needs you to listen, give them the gift of your time.)
33. **Pause:** Stop and ask for guidance today.
34. **Pray:** Pray for those who struggle, for those who mourn, for those who are lost.
35. **Refrain:** Refrain from doing too much, and simply find time to be.
36. **Give:** Give yourself time to hear God's word today.
37. **Pause:** Pause and ask for God to be a part of your day.
38. **Pray:** What is on your heart to pray for today?
39. **Refrain:** Refrain from "busyness" today so you can be with God and those you love.
40. **Give:** Give yourself time to sit in silence today and be with God.

## Easter Practices

Easter is the season in which we celebrate the risen Christ. During Easter we hear stories of Jesus' appearances to his friends and disciples. During this time we hear Christ passing on words and wisdom to his followers who are feeling alone or abandoned. Easter is a season of joy, mystery, and new life. Inviting people into that mystery, joy, and new life is a great

way to experience the Season of Easter.

## Stories of Jesus in Our Lives

Many of the Easter stories are of the resurrected Jesus appearing to people and showing them how to live in a new way. In these stories people encounter the mystery and a call to a new life. What if you were to intentionally invite people to recognize where Jesus is appearing in his or her life? Invite them to notice where they see Jesus? How do they see Jesus? When do they see Jesus? What does that look like on a day-to-day basis?

As you engage in hearing the stories throughout Easter, encourage people to take some time each day to reflect upon where Jesus was seen today, where it was, and how they recognized it. As they notice Jesus in their daily lives, ask them to take those moments, give thanks for them, and offer them up in a prayer of Thanksgiving. How might they pray for the people who helped you see Jesus, pray for continued experience with the resurrected Jesus in life daily, and/or pray for whatever comes to mind.

## Easter Joy

Brené Brown, researcher and storyteller, talks about joy and gratitude. "It's not joy that makes us grateful, it's gratitude that makes us joyful." Practicing gratitude helps us realize and claim those things for which we are thankful, those things that bring us joy, those things that make our life new and resurrected each day.

In this time of Easter, make it a practice to write down those things for which you are grateful. Write it in a journal, write it on scraps of paper and keep it in a bowl on your dining room table, write it on a post-it note and stick it to your mirror. However you want to embrace gratitude, do it intentionally this Easter Season. Then, take some time each week to notice where these things have brought you new life and resurrection.



## Flipping the Church, Again

Lee Yates

**R**everend Terry Ewing once told me that the only thing that happens fast in the Church is trouble. Everything else takes time. Over the years, that has proven to be very true. Change that happens quickly is often knee-jerk or for the wrong reasons. That means, the best changes are better discovered than decided. We look up and realize that things are being done different. The question isn't whether we want to change but rather, our willingness to except the change we have discovered. Those who have spent years helping others discover and claim the way God is moving are very aware of how difficult this process can be. It is even more challenging when it comes to our own discoveries. We are professionals. We have years of experience, technique, and (too often) shtick in our tool box. What are we to do when God turns our vocation upside down?

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**Lee Yates** worked for 15 years in congregational ministry. He is now devoting himself to writing, resourcing and consulting. Lee has done everything from resourcing small congregations and directing national youth events. Along the way he has developed a variety of educational resources including, *Joining the Story*, a chronological study of the Old Testament. Lee has written for the United Church of Christ's *Faith Practices*, the National Council of Churches' *New Earth* camp curriculum, and is a regular contributor to *[D]mergent.org*. He was also part of the design team for Eastern Mennonite University's Y-STAR (Youth and Trauma) curriculum. Lee spends much of his summer leading hands on mission events and keynoting church camps.

## Media, Medium, and Story

Epiphany came early to my congregation's after-school program. It was actually the first week of Advent and I was very proud of my lesson plan for the youth. We looked at how each Gospel began, and quickly dissected the typical nativity set. We discussed tradition and defined synopsis. We talked about how stories are told. I was prepared for a great discussion based on all the kids had learned. Instead, I got smacked in the face with indifference. They were not worried about the discrepancies. They quickly got over the lack of biblical evidence for a donkey. The question for them wasn't one of Biblical authority, exegesis, or even exasperation over the donkey going the way of Santa. They took in all that was given and responded with the timeless theological question, "Can we play a game now?" Another updated the question into more modern language, asking "Can I get my tablet out?"

I tried my best to draw them into conversation but failed miserably. So, I went with the flow and found a way for them to play. I gave them Legos to work with and asked them to create a Nativity set out of the blocks. Most jumped in, surprised by the sudden change in plans. A couple of the kids complained and, against my better judgment, I allowed them to get tablets so they wouldn't disrupt the rest of the group.

Those with tablets quickly loaded up their favorite game, Minecraft. For those that don't know, Minecraft uses very simple graphics that look like they were taken straight from the 1980s, and allows players to dig and chop for various resources while building in an open environment where physics don't really apply. I was frustrated that they wouldn't stay engaged with the group, then realized they were playing together. Even though they were on opposite corners of the room, my anti-social whiners were actually connecting through the game. I challenged them to create their own Nativity set on Minecraft and then save it for the group to see.

This is where Epiphany enters. I had worked so hard to show them how others had told the Christmas story, but what they really found joy in was discovering their own version of the story. Instead of asking, "How did the Gospel writers tell the story?" I should have been asking, "How would you tell the Christmas story?" Instead of asking them to be interested in what I found interesting, I should have made room for the Spirit and for the youth to enter the story.

I sat and watched kids swapping blocks for various parts of a manger. They argued about which figures should be used for which characters in their block creation. Others started designing small barns in cyberspace. Those working in different mediums invited others to check out what they were doing. By the end of our time, we had some fun Lego nativity sets. Those working on Minecraft promised to finish during the week and bring back their work to share the next week.

The next gathering was show and tell. Kids had built elaborate nativity scenes in cyberspace. Others were pulling out their phones to take pictures of the previous weeks creations. We had Lego sheep and unicorns. Small figures had been reworked as the holy family. My favorite was the Lego figure of Professor Dumbledore's head on white body with flowing gown of Princess Leah to form a Christmas angel. Then tablets and laptops came out as we saw how many different animals kids could conjure ("spawn" I discovered, was the appropriate term) in Minecraft. Some had built people like statues. Another, inspired by *Vegitales*' cartoons, had inserted giant watermelons to represent the figures.

We quickly moved to the posting of our pictures on Facebook. It wasn't really part of the plan, but it came naturally to the group. We tagged parents in the pictures so they could see what had been done. We shared them in the church's Facebook group, and started noticing some likes from friends at other churches and even some church camp friends and counselors. Some youth ministers I knew had passed on the pictures and invited

their youth to do something similar. The next Sunday in worship, we included some of the pictures in the announcement slides on the big screen.

Can you imagine what would have happened if any of this had been planned? How much further could this project have reached? How many more kids who don't come to our group might have participated by sending in pictures of their creations or a screen-grab of their digital construction? How many families might have read the nativity story together in preparation for a Lego-thon in the living room? How many young people might have heard the Christmas story in a new way, or even for the first time? The limitations were endless, as was the amount I didn't know about expressing faith in a new world. The kids were teaching me and I tried to keep up.

Lent rolled around and we tried a similar project. We read the story together, then invited everyone to go home and create their own version of the story. They would then bring back to the group to share. Amazingly, their response to reading the Scripture was more questions than creativity. We discovered that the Easter story is not as well known in popular culture. With some of our youth being the only church attenders in the family, they had not heard the full story before. We had some great conversations before leaving. Everyone still left with the invitation to create their own version. The next week, some mentioned that they had to look up the Scripture to read it again when they got home. I assumed they meant looking in the family Bible. They meant Google. We started out, just like we had with Advent but the outcome was different. Fascinated by the outcome of our time together, I started evaluating what we were discovering from the youth and how to apply it.

## Flipping the Church

The public schools were my next teacher. My son, now in middle school, brings a laptop computer back and forth from school to home

each day. His books and many assignments are found on the computer. Teachers can even answer questions on-line when the kids are away from the classroom. My son's math teacher engages in a practice known to educators as "flipping the classroom." She assigns videos for the kids to watch at home, then has them do the practice problems to go with it at school so she can help them if they struggle or have a peer assist them.

In some ways, this is what we had done at church. We invited people to read the scripture together, then go home and dwell in it. When they came back, we allowed their individual ideas, questions, and sharing to dictate the conversation. The idea of flipping the church seemed to fit where the youth were leading us. Of course, it didn't take long to realize we were not discovering something new. It seemed hauntingly familiar, and as I wrestled with the theological foundation behind it, I realized that we were returning to an earlier style of church. Somehow, over time, church evolved from an experience where everyone brought their gifts to God and gave thanks, to a place you went to receive God's blessing or knowledge.

This is a big change. There is a different mindset in "bringing" verses "receiving." There are elements of both in any church gathering, but the more modern expression has forgotten the importance of affirming the gifts of God's people. Over time, we have assumed that we come to church from a place of deficit, needing to be filled, healed or saved from ourselves. Faith becomes a commodity or a balm that we need to fill us or fix us rather than a joyful expression of an everyday walk with God.

From the Great Thanksgiving to the early pot-luck dinners Paul attended in Acts, the gathering of the blessed to share and bring praise has been foundational to our life as church. Somehow the church got flipped and the kids in my group were simply ready to flip it back. They were not coming to receive but to share in a blessing. We told them they had gifts to share and they believed us! They just didn't know how to express those gifts when the language and structure around them was

foreign. By allowing youth to engage technology as a practice of faith, they became more and more comfortable and capable of sharing their gifts.

## Need for Meetings or Meeting Needs

One of the biggest challenges to applying technology in your program, or finding ways to “flip the church” has been my own brain. I have years of experience doing things one way and a lot of experiential data collected to justify my approach. More than breaking routines, I find myself afraid of losing control. I used to know how most of our time would be spent.

For years, each meeting started with a “check-in” time where we shared what we had been up to since we last met. This was my chance to feel out the group see how they would react to each other. They shared highs and lows since their last time together and I could see who was in a good mood and who was cranky. The kids got to catch up with teach other and get to know each other better while I took the emotional temperature of the room. At some point, this ritual grew tiresome. I watched lots of kids on phones, texting or updating their Facebook while we shared. I’d fuss at them for not paying attention to each other and not being part of the community.

Eventually I realized that I was missing a bigger picture. I was the only one who needed this ritual. They had already done this same activity on-line. They had posted pictures of the stories they were sharing on Instagram or Facebook and even “liked” or commented on each other’s posts. Check-in happened before they walked into the room and they were sharing the experience of being together with those who couldn’t make it rather than listening to something they already knew. The very nature of our gathering had changed.

Instead of “how have you been?” the group wanted to ask, “What are we going to do?” Just showing up for the sake of being a group was not enough to interest any of them. This

means that many of our assumptions about why we meet may not be true. The “encounter group” experience that shaped my youth and young adult experience was not something the kids in my care were looking for or needed. They didn’t feel a need to have time away from their family because they already have lots of that. They didn’t feel the need to hear what their peers think about things because they can read that on-line any time. They didn’t need to hear what their peers had been up to because they already saw the pictures or a Vine of it or watched the footage on YouTube. The purpose of meetings, when I was young, was to meet. That, in itself, was a significant enough of a purpose to draw us together. While my brain still clings to personal experience as a template, the day of the encounter group has passed.

In an attempt to better understand what our youth needed out of their time together, I asked them to list what they had enjoyed most over the past year. Surprisingly, the top item was visiting shut-ins. We had taken potted plants to each one in the fall. Next was a night we went out for ice-cream and a soccer game. One of the kids from Church couldn’t make it so we went to his game together. Another event that was never shared as a favorite, but always found its way into conversation was a “clean-up” night in the Church. We cleaned our room and helped sort some others. They all remembered it. It wasn’t a negative experience but they were not ready to call it a favorite. Still, they remembered it and it was part of their group identity.

Years of training in youth ministry had taught me all about age appropriate programming, psycho-social development and the needs youth have to be with peers to share and learn. What got left out was community. Looking back on the previous year’s calendar, I realized how little we did outside our group meeting space or social circle. It’s much easier to contain our activity in the church basement. It was easier to clean up, and required less planning, but if we spend all our time in the basement then the kids aren’t really part of the

church. They liked being together but loved being part of something bigger.

Building this year's calendar started with these three core experiences:

- ◆ Connecting with members of the church who were older and younger than us
- ◆ Supporting what youth in our church were doing, despite their attendance
- ◆ Finding ways to work and serve together.

In the time left we would play games, eat snacks, study the Bible, and pray. Even the grouchiest of the group got excited about this plan. We made a list of favorite snacks and games to get that out of the way, then let the kids dictate what issues were important to them. It is important to note that we did not leave all the planning up to the kids. We took their interests. We took their ideas. Then, we set out a schedule that was less about meeting together and more about meeting the needs of others.

## Keeping Community

Through all of this, I worried about how all the changes would impact the feeling of community and relationships within the group. I knew we were headed in the right direction but hoped we could find some time to simply let the members of the group hang out and have time to strengthen their connections. After all, there is great power in just playing together. Luckily, we found a digital platform for that too. Actually, the kids invited me to join them in their game. I heard two of the kids discussing a game called "Clash of Clans" that they played on their phones and tablets. They were creating a new "clan" (social group within the game that works together to help each other). They invited me to join, and I took the opportunity to let them teach me and be my "clan leaders." When they started, there were ten in the clan. Four were active in the youth program. Three more were cousins who

attended occasionally. Two others were friends from school. The game includes a chat screen for players to request assistance or just visit and the group was very active.

The organizers listed the group as public so they soon had strangers joining them. This required them to set some expectations for who they would allow in the clan and expectations for behavior. "Don't cuss, participate and be loyal," were the agreed upon expectations. Quickly, the group included young people from Asia and Australia. They talked about school and learned about time-zones. The group leaders kicked out people who were rude or inappropriate. A community formed around play that reflected the ethics and faith we shared at Church.

I discovered they were connecting through other games too. They played on-line games and shared through social media. They connected in ways that I hadn't imagined. My concern was keeping them connected but connection was a language they spoke fluently already. I just didn't know their dialect. The digital connections were not the same as the face to face meetings of my youth but they served a similar role. I had another epiphany as my youth introduced me to on-line gaming, or to put it in old youth group language, a digital "icebreaker" or "group builder." Somewhere in my mind, I heard a commercial spokesperson saying, "Community: there is an app for that!"

## Apps and Application

What I have learned from my youth over the past few years could be quickly dismissed as a list of computer games and phone apps. Critics would ask, "How are you shaping faith?" At one point in my ministry, I would have offered a similar critique. Now, I'm less concerned about controlling how faith is shaped and more curious what new way God will shape us. Digital platforms for ministry are in their infancy. We are just beginning to understand how to make community mobile. We are just beginning to connect people beyond the bounds of buildings and committees. We are

just beginning to see what new thing God is doing.

Ironically, technology isn't really offering us something new. In reality, technology is taking us back to a time when church happened at home and with our friends. Technology is forcing us to make faith formation a portable, everyday experience rather than a Sunday

morning commodity. Technology is inviting us to share the Gospel much broader than any "bring a friend campaign" could ever reach. This is a time to ask ourselves, "How will we tell the story?" The answer to that question will determine whether anyone hears us or not.



## Motivation for Adult Faith Formation

Janet Schaeffler, OP

**W**henever adult faith formation ministers gather, one of the most popular questions asked and discussed is often: How do we motivate adults to grow in their faith? Terrel Bell, the Secretary of Education in the cabinet of Ronald Regan, once said, “There are three things to remember about education. The first is motivation. The second is motivation. The third is motivation.”

A challenging thought about motivation was found a few years ago on the former website for the Nebraska Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy: “Motivation is an unstable hypothetical construct which cannot be directly measured...” Then it went on to explain:

- ◆ “People have a finite amount of energy that can be applied to a goal
- ◆ People change their minds about what they want
- ◆ They vary in how they feel—at different times
- ◆ They vary in how much effort they will expend when they finally get to it
- ◆ Friends, family, job, sports, normal life, all compete with education...”

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Deci and Flaste pose an important consideration: “The proper question is not, ‘How can people motivate others?’ but rather, ‘How can people create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?’” (10) Thus, our real question is: How do we motivate to motivate?

With that in mind, there has been much research about adult learning and motivation. Merriam and Caffarella offer an overview of much of the research. Leon McKenzie and Travis Shipp, at the time two professors at Indiana University, were the first to seriously study reasons for participation in adult *religious* education. Their “study among Roman Catholics was replicated numerous times with similar findings in a variety of faith traditions by their students.” (McKenzie and Harton, 47). Even though this research took place several years ago, in your experience, would these statistics be similar today?

- ◆ Resistance to Education: Some 16% had a negative mindset about education (too old to learn; had learned all they needed to know; don’t like new ideas, etc.).
- ◆ Secular Orientation: Around 13% reported they stayed away because they were in some way alienated from church teaching/practice.
- ◆ Estrangement: Around 10% said they felt estranged from the mainstream of the church.
- ◆ Marginality: 19% indicated that they were basically non-joiners.
- ◆ Aversion to Church-based Education: Roughly 18% reported that the church-sponsored programs didn’t offer anything to meet their needs/interests.
- ◆ Activity: 20% cited busy schedules, other family or social responsibilities and/or were scheduled at inconvenient times.
- ◆ Inability: 4% indicated physical incapacity as a reason for not participating

Consider:

- *Would those statistics be relatively the same for your congregation today?*
- *What do these statistics say to you?*
- *What would be some things you might do if these realities were true for your people?*

## Helping Adults Motivate Themselves

Adult faith formation directors and teams need to address several areas to create the conditions to help people motivate themselves. No one simple motivational formula will work. Let’s look at some actions/attitudes to help people motivate themselves.

The research from McKenzie and Schipp suggests that the character of congregational life is a significant influence on motivation.

- ◆ A church that is essentially lifeless, that has uninspiring liturgies, little outreach, is going to have difficulty in engaging adults in ongoing formation.
- ◆ A foundational element of church life is welcoming and hospitality. If someone doesn’t feel a part, doesn’t feel at home and comfortable, why would they even want to venture into a deepened journey into their faith—with this community?
- ◆ As part of welcoming/hospitality, we might look at areas of church life we’ve never thought of as connected to motivating for adult faith formation. Perhaps we need to be perceptive, to be proactive. The challenge is adult faith formation is not just about planning programs; it is who we are; it’s everything we do.

With other staff members and leadership people within the church, ask yourselves:

- ◆ How does the signage on our church invite people to our community? How

does it motivate them to ongoing growth?

- ◆ What do the registration procedures for our church “teach” people about our community, about what we believe about God, about belonging, about diversity?
- ◆ What do our guidelines/procedures “teach” people about our community, about what we believe about hospitality, inclusivity, spirituality, prayer, justice and outreach, God?
- ◆ Does our website invite/motivate adults to continue their journey in faith?
- ◆ What does our church budget “teach” our people about what’s most important in our faith, about what we’re called to do/to be as a Christian people?

For some practical ideas on congregational life, see *The U. S. Congregational Life Survey: Fastest Growing Presbyterian Churches*.

Consider:

- *Which church leadership groups would be appropriate to engage in a conversation with us around these questions?*
- *After the conversation: what did we learn about the character of our church life/the reality that everything teaches?*
- *How might these components of our church affect motivation for ongoing faith growth in our adults?*

## An Atmosphere for Motivation

Another implication of the research from McKenzie and Schipp is the need to create an atmosphere that disposes parishioners to learn. Atmosphere includes church leadership style, financial priorities, the spaces for adult learning, the types of events and gatherings, the visuals. All these—and many others—together proclaim: discipleship warrants

lifelong learning and this church takes that responsibility seriously.

Is everything we’re doing saying that adults are important, that adult faith formation is a priority, that we’ve committed excellence to it, and that we care about our members, as adults?

Are our churches—by their very atmosphere—places where it would be difficult not to learn? Does everything about our churches shout that we’re a learning community, and it’s fun to grow in faith, it’s important to grow in faith, and there’s many ways to grow in faith?

Churches need to have an ongoing strategy to help adults make connections between being a disciple of Jesus and pursuing a deeper understanding of faith. Adults need to be helped to realize that what they learned about their faith as children will not serve them completely in their adult lives, especially in our rapidly changing, complex world of questions and challenges.

We absolutely need to be concerned about faith formation for our children and youth. But if we’re putting all our resources and time there, and nothing for adults, what message is that giving? What is that teaching? Might that be “teaching” that our faith is a faith for children? We know it’s not, but what would those actions be “saying”?

Consider:

- *What in our church climate proclaims to the adults that we take adults seriously, that adults and their faith growth are extremely important?*
- *Are our adults motivated to grow in faith because of the climate in the parish; because all the adults around them are engaged—in some way—in lifelong learning; because in our church it is a fun place to learn, etc.?*

## The Learning Process as Motivational

The research of McKenzie and Shipp also reminds us that we need to address the adult learning process. If parishioners anticipate that the process and the environment will not be meaningful to them, they will not show up (or take advantage of individual and/or virtual opportunities). Although some will be satisfied with just getting information, the majority of adults today are looking for an integrated experience that deepens their faith. High-quality adult faith formation integrates prayer, community building, learning, critical analysis, reflection and conversation. All of these combine to help the formation and transformation happen; to help adults answer the “so what?” question. What does this have to do with my life? Now what? What do I do now?

The research also suggests that even with a good church environment and a well-developed positive orientation to learning, motivation to participate—through many and varied delivery systems—may still be problematic. The growing complexity of adult life and its schedules is the reality. There is less time to “attend” programs, to engage with others through various methods. What do we do? One important thing: don’t fight the schedules.

First, what are the various ways we can infuse formation into all the venues of existing congregational life? Do all church meetings and gatherings contain a portion of formation? Is any and all written communication that comes from the church (and the website) informational, or do we take the opportunity to include and use it also for vibrant formation?

Second, encourage and support independent learning, as well as learning in small groups—wherever people are: in their homes, in apartment complexes, at their workplaces, wherever/whenever they can

create the places. They don’t always have to come to the church building.

Third, utilize today’s technology and the ways of connecting that we’ve never had before: use the internet for online book clubs, mom’s support groups, Bible studies; on-going follow up with various groups; make church websites interactive; and more.

Consider:

- *Do each of our opportunities integrate prayer, community building, learning, critical analysis, reflection and conversation?*
- *How do we help adults answer the “so what” question each time we gather for and/or provide opportunities/methods for adult faith formation?*
- *Which of these suggestions (and others) can we do to work within the reality that people have less and less time today for more and more priorities?*

## Meeting Needs

This is most crucial when we’re thinking about motivating adults (helping adults to motivate themselves). If opportunities do not coincide with needs and interests, adults will not respond. People are attracted and motivated usually because of one of two things: 1) when they’re facing *life transitions* (raising children, aging parents, baptism, first communion, job changes, faith questions, etc.); and/or 2) when there’s a gap between their present level of understanding, skill or performance and/or growth and the desired goal they’ve set for themselves (or their organization/community/church expectations). They recognize the gap; they know they have a need, an interest.

Thus, we need to begin with who the people are, with their needs and interests. Often we start with our needs, our interests; we start with church questions rather than life questions. Sometimes we’re giving answers for questions people don’t have; then we wonder why they don’t come. It’s not that the church doesn’t have answers that guide our faith

journey, but people have to be ready to hear. The answers, the “content,” has to resonate with their lives, their questions, their needs and interests, or they won’t even *be there* to hear.

We need to be open to what is happening in real life. What did churches do at the time of 9/11, the sexual abuse crisis, the Sandy Hook tragedy? (Put in there anything that happens nationally, internationally or locally that grabs the attention, touches the hearts and concerns of the people.) What did churches do? Perhaps we don’t begin by having a class: “the church says. . .” We just open our doors to a safe, comfortable place and let people talk about their fears, their anger, whatever their feelings because of the situation. Then, at some point (it might not be the first week), we ask, “What is there in our tradition that will get us through this?” There are God answers to our life questions, but we need to begin with people’s feelings, their needs and interests.

Consider:

- Which of our adult faith formation programs focus on people’s life questions?
- Which of our programs are focused on people’s life transitions?
- Which local, national, international events have we responded to through adult faith formation? Which current ones could we?

## Challenges of Motivation

There are questions that most adults voice (or quietly think about) when considering adult formation opportunities in all the various formats offered today:

- ◆ Is it worth my time?
- ◆ Is it relevant?
- ◆ Will the facilitator model genuine faith?
- ◆ Will the material and discussions be “too deep” for me?
- ◆ Will the material and discussions be “too simple” for me?

- ◆ Will I be put on the spot?
- ◆ Will the group/the program do what it promises?
- ◆ Will they really care about me?
- ◆ Is it worth my effort?

These questions revolve around two realities that are uppermost for today’s adults: 1) Does this meet my life’s needs and questions? and 2) Will I be welcomed, feel comfortable and will it be worth my time?

Our programs and ministries must be in touch with people’s real circumstances and concerns. Just as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we must journey with people, listen to them, share our faith, help them to find in the Good News the answer to their hearts’ deepest question, and prepare them to live as Jesus’ disciples. (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, #27)

Simple, but deep, reasons for motivation!

Another research study tells us: Adults today hunger for meaning and have a passionate interest in spirituality. Lindsay and Gallup remind us: “The churches in America. . . face a historic moment of opportunity. Surveys record an unprecedented desire for religious and spiritual growth among people in all walks of life. . . There is an intense searching for spiritual moorings, a hunger for God. It is for churches to seize the moment and to direct this often vague and free-floating spirituality into a solid and lived-out faith.”

As we continue to encourage people to motivate themselves, we are fortunate to have many suggestions and reminders:

- ◆ Get Your Audience Pumped: 30 Ways to Motivate Adult Learners  
[http://thelearningcoach.com/elearning\\_design/isd/30-ways-to-motivate-adult-learners/](http://thelearningcoach.com/elearning_design/isd/30-ways-to-motivate-adult-learners/)
- ◆ 17 Tips to Motivate Adult Learners  
<http://elearningindustry.com/17-tips-to-motivate-adult-learners>

- ◆ Motivating Catholic Faith Formation in Established Programs  
<http://www.newcatholicevangelization.com/2014/03/05/motivating-catholic-adult-learning-in-established-programs/>
- ◆ Best Practices in Adult Faith Formation  
[http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/\\_best\\_practices\\_in\\_adult\\_faith\\_formation.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/_best_practices_in_adult_faith_formation.pdf)
- ◆ Motivation in Adult Learners  
<http://www.slideshare.net/coachjoeryan/motivation-in-adult-learning>
- ◆ 9 Strategies to Spark Adult Students' Intrinsic Motivation  
<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/nine-strategies-to-spark-adult-students-intrinsic-motivation/>
- ◆ Innovative Ways for Motivating Adults for Learning  
<http://www.cremole.eu/guidebook.pdf>
- ◆ 30 Things We Know for Sure about Adult Learning  
[http://www.muskegoncc.edu/Include/CTL%20DOCS/XXIX\\_No4.pdf](http://www.muskegoncc.edu/Include/CTL%20DOCS/XXIX_No4.pdf)

Consider:

- *How are we going to motivate people to motivate themselves?*
- *How do we—and will we—continually ascertain the needs and interests of our people, journey with them, listen to them?*

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## Milestones as a Means to Empower and Equip Lives of Faith

Debbie Streicher

**A** milestone is an action or event marking a significant change or stage in development. Birthdays, anniversaries, new homes, new jobs, getting a driver's license, learning to ride a bike, and graduating from high school or college are all examples of times of significant change in our lives. But how many of the events listed are used as opportunities to help empower and equip children, youth, and adults with the ability to grow in their faith? Empowerment leads to spiritual growth and engagement in a faith journey.

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BC Crothers begins her book, *Church-Filling Techniques for Building Community*, with a letter to church leadership:

*Dear Minister,  
You are not alone in feeling despair as you look out on to the near-empty pews. You are not alone in your questioning of people's faith, commitment, love of God and church in today's world. You are not alone when seeking ways to create change, stimulate parish growth; wondering if your efforts would bear fruit, and in your darkest moments ask, "Why bother?" (3)*

She goes on to write that the answer is one small step at a time as the only way to effect change. Her suggestions for growing community include times to gather for special events such as birthdays, memory of loved ones, memory of animals, family day, etc. These events can be defined as milestones in the lives of those in the congregation. Providing an opportunity to add the element of faith through prayer and blessing enriches lives and empowers all ages to grow in their faith life.

Each time an event happens, the norm becomes the building of relationships, praying for one another and blessing one another. One step at a time, one milestone event at a time grows faith lives. Adding faith to everyday events becomes the norm. This does not happen overnight or without continued support, encouragement, and follow-up from leadership.

Milestone moments can be embraced as a time to empower all ages in both the congregation and in the home. The end result enables and equips us to serve others through our faith in the greater world. Connecting with God during significant events in our lives through relationships, prayer, and blessing forms a strong faith foundation. Ultimately faith talk becomes a way of life and is included in everyday happenings as well as times of significant change. Lifelong faith formation is

realized through continued opportunities and invitations to celebrate milestones in our lives.

In *For Everything a Season, 75 Blessings for Life's Milestones*, Mary Nilsen writes,

We have become increasingly aware of many people of faith who yearn for some sense of the sacred in the midst of very hectic lives. However, they simply do not know what to do or how to do it. This book is one response to the question, "How can I make both the ordinary and the special events of my life and lives of those I care about more intentionally sacred?"

Our hope and prayer is that this tool will help you discover the profound joy and hope in this God who can bring calm in the midst of chaos, turn our mourning into dancing, and transform our everyday interactions in time and place into holy moments of timeless grace. (vii)

*For Everything a Season* is now in its third edition. It is a tool to help empower families in the home to "do ministry" and bring the element of faith, the sacred, as Mary writes to both the good and the bad in everyday, ordinary events in our lives. There are 75 blessings for life's milestones in this book that can be given to parents, grandparents, and others for all different seasons of their lives. Placing this book in the hands of parents, grandparents, and other adults is a first step in empowering in the home.

On the next page is sample from *For Everything a Season, 75 Blessings for Life's Milestones*.

## Blessing for Those Leaving Home

**PREPARATION** This blessing is intended to be used when children become young adults and move out of the family home heading for college, the military, jobs . . . Life changes dramatically for the person leaving, but also for those remaining at home. This blessing gives all present a chance to express their thoughts and feelings about this change.

Set a begging bowl\* on a table.

### WELCOME

*For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven.*

Welcome to this time of saying good-bye as one member leaves the family nest.

### PRAYER

Thank you, God,  
for the years of  
learning and growing, of  
loving and giving, we have  
had together. We ask your  
grace upon (name) who is leaving and  
on those who remain behind. Give us all we need as we move  
into a new stage of life, separated by space, but bound together  
in love. Amen

### BIBLE TEXT

*Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from  
your presence? . . . If I take the wings of the morning and  
settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand  
shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.*

Psalm 139:7, 9-10

### REFLECTION

The image of God's hand leading us wherever we go, whether together or apart, is a comforting one. Have all present finish these sentences:

When I look ahead, I feel saddest about . . .

I feel most excited about . . .

My prayer for the future is . . .

During the days and weeks ahead, what I need from you  
who love me is . . .

### RITUAL ACTION

Pass the begging bowl from person to person, asking each person to hold it up and say, Ever-present God, please lead me and give me all I need in the days ahead.

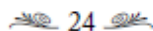
### SONG

Place your hands on the person leaving and sing or say,  
*As You Go on Your Way*, (p. 84).

\*For more information see the Introduction.

### BLESSING

May the hand of God hold us fast, keeping us safe from all danger. Amen



*In Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* David Anderson lists five principles for living and passing on faith:

- ◆ Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships—often in our own homes.
- ◆ The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and ministry of the home.
- ◆ Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church too.
- ◆ Faith is caught more than it is taught.

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

He writes, that “this foundational orientation helps congregational leaders see the work of the church beyond the venue of congregational activities. Through a variety of relationships and daily life experiences, the Holy Spirit works in people’s lives to form faith” (15)

I would like to emphasize the importance for leaders to see beyond the activities happening in the congregation and envision the impact our ministries could have if we role

model significant milestones in our faith communities, but also provide ample tools and ways to empower the same ministry to take place in the home. Please take a moment to revisit the five principles listed above and add the words “*using faith milestones as a tool for lifelong faith formation*” to the end of each principle. Can you envision the impact on the lives of all ages if we intentionally connect with God for every milestone in our lives?

### Story 1

Deaconess Kristen Baltrum, Director of Youth and Household Ministry at Bethlehem Lutheran in Longmont, CO, is passionate about equipping households with a means to “do faith” at home. She has organized a special room in the church building for families to gather with children to do faith activities or to choose an activity for the home. There are also 16 milestones boxes. From losing a tooth to getting a new pet to retirement, all the ages are invited to take a bag with tools to equip and empower them to do a milestone in their homes. See a video of Kristen and her ministry at [www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org).

### Story 2

A congregation in Minot, ND lost most of their resources for Christian education during a flood in 2011. This provided an opportunity for them to assess their ministries and introduce some changes and experience new beginnings. Out of tragedy and loss came a sense of need to redefine programs and shift to a ministry model celebrating milestones regularly in the congregation and including all ages. They are excited about how modeling milestones in the congregation will grow towards encouraging milestones to happen in the home too.

### Story 3

Hermitage United Methodist in Hermitage, TN designs a trifold brochure each year for parents with the schedule for milestones to be celebrated. The brochure includes a guide for practicing and nurturing faith at home for parents as well. The brochure states:

Hermitage United Methodist’s Milestone Ministry Program helps to make a connection between our everyday lives and our faith life. Faith is formed through personal and trusted relationships. Jesus started with a few disciples who went and gathered more disciples from their homes and surrounding communities. Through their efforts faith communities began to grow. Growing in faith is not just a Sunday morning activity here at HUMC. It’s part of all we are and all we do as God’s beloved people. ([Brochure](#))

### Story 4

[St. Mark’s Lutheran in Williamsport, PA](#) has a milestones ministry for all different ages. They explain their milestones are marked by:

- ◆ Celebration during worship. Families and the congregation celebrate the milestone together.
- ◆ Gifts. Each milestone is celebrated with gifts from the congregation. The gifts serve as a reminder for the individual as their faith journey continues.
- ◆ A luncheon. The families gather for fellowship and lunch. Often, this is an opportunity for the milestone recipient to examine and understand their gifts.
- ◆ Taking it all home. Families begin to use the tools and experiences in their daily lives at home. Growth in faith is going on everywhere!

The first milestone for young families is baptism and they give the gift of a faith chest for each child with the vision it will be filled with more physical memories of life’s events over the years.



In the stories I shared and in most congregations, I find we tend to focus celebrating milestones around significant markers on the faith journey of children, youth, and families. Recognizing milestones in the lives of adults is important too.

In their book, *Celebrating the Milestones of Faith*, Laura and Robert J Keeley write:

Children and teens need to see adult people of faith who are deepening their relationship with God. They need to know how adults pray. They need to see them in times of sorrow and doubt, and in times of sadness and joy. We cannot expect children to grow into mature disciples unless they see how other followers of Christ live a life of faith. Milestone celebrations allow the church community to participate in the faith journey of all its members, not just the young. (10)

[Milestones Ministry](#) recently published eight milestones specifically for times in our adult lives when it is important to walk side by side with one another as a faith community for events we seldom connect with God.

- ◆ Aging Parent
- ◆ Grandparents
- ◆ Retirement
- ◆ Return from Military Deployment
- ◆ New Job
- ◆ New Home
- ◆ Anniversary of Marriage
- ◆ Empty Nest

These mark the beginning of naming milestones and times in our life that are important and integral to our lives. Including children and youth as we process these events in the lives of adults is teaching them about our faith. We share joy and sorrow through every age.

## Suggested Steps to begin a Milestones Ministry Model

1. Assess what milestones, both church and every day, events that may already be happening in the congregation and in homes. In some communities, it may be more related to adults, in others children and families.
2. Choose whether you will do one regularly, for example, monthly. Some congregations begin with one or two the first year. Doing one monthly helps set up a tradition that a significant event will be celebrated each month. Will milestones in the home be encouraged? What tools would be provided for households? How would you follow-up with those doing them in the home?
3. Build a consistent framework for each milestone to create a common language using basic steps for establishing a faith practice. Milestones Ministry uses four steps: 1) Caring Conversations, 2) Devotions, 3) Service, and 4) Rituals and Traditions. *For Everything a Season* uses a basic five step process: 1) Welcome, 2) Prayer, 3) Bible Text, 4) Reflection, and 5) Ritual Action. Consistency is important to empower all ages.
4. Share stories about each milestone whether done in the congregation or in households via newsletters, FB pages, and inviting individuals to tell their story during a worship service. We, as leaders of the church, can talk endlessly about the importance of faith practices and having a faith life. People expect us to tell stories. But when the stories come from the congregation as personal faith stories about where God is at work in their lives, we tend to sit up and listen. I would love to say that I changed a life, but nine times out of ten, God has called the quiet five year-old or the disabled elderly who has been

sitting in the back for years to be his voice. It changes hearts and minds.

5. Gradually, over time, add more milestones. This has the potential to change the way we do ministry and eventually become entirely a work of the people.

Reflecting on the letter from BC Crothers to ministers I quoted at the beginning of this article:

*You are not alone in your questioning of people's faith, commitment, love of God and church in today's world. You are not alone when seeking ways to create change, stimulate parish growth; wondering if your efforts would bear fruit, and in your darkest moments ask, "Why bother?"*

Perhaps investigating where milestones could make a difference in your ministry may be an answer to *why bother?* It is clear you would not be alone if all the ages were invited to view milestones in their lives as occasions to connect with God. Empowering and equipping all ages to "do ministry" in the congregation and in the home could create a stimulating change and establish a new way to grow the church.

I want you to realize that I continue to work as hard as I know how for you, and also for the Christians over at Laodicea. Not many of you have met me face-to-face, but that doesn't make any difference. Know that I'm on your side, right alongside you. You're not in this alone.  
(Colossians 2:1, *The Message*)

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## Intergenerational Models, Programs, and Ideas across Church Life

Jim Merhaut

**T**he church is an intergenerational community. All generations must be present in order to capture a glimpse of the full nature of the Body of Christ. Missing generations in worship and in the other ministries of a church leave gaping holes in the body. Church's struggle to keep the generations together in a culture that is so accustomed to keeping them apart, but the struggle is getting easier. There is an increasing supply of resources available to churches that want to be more intentionally intergenerational. There are more programs flourishing in many denominations that provide vivid examples of the practicality and the power of bringing the generations together for meaningful ministry experiences. Try Googling "intergenerational faith formation" or "intergenerational ministry resources" to get a sense of what is out there

Intergenerational practitioners are now organizing themselves more effectively and getting more serious about spreading the good news about intergenerational ministries. Over 100 Christian intergenerational practitioners from around the world gathered in Connecticut in early October, 2014 for a symposium to consider the future of intergenerational ministries. This group, gathered by Lifelong Faith Associates under the direction of John Roberto, was rich in experience

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and wisdom. They were also remarkably positive and hopeful. It was a collection of inspired people who sensed that their time had come and they were forging ahead with an abundance of ideas about how to recover the intergenerational character of the body of Christ.

This essay will describe and expand some of the practical ideas that surfaced at the symposium for intergenerational programming in light of the five components of church life identified in the book, *Generations Together* (one of the books that inspired the symposium). The five components are caring, praying, learning, celebrating and serving.

## Caring

This essential component of church life cultivates signs of affection and admiration across generations in the congregation and community. It is essentially about intergenerational relationship building in every ministry of the church. Caring is expressed when church members gather together socially, when they share stories with each other, when they express appreciation for each other, and when they offer warm hospitality to each other and to newcomers. You might think of it as a way of building an emotionally intelligent church.

Consider the power of caring. There are few feelings more desired or more motivating than the feeling that someone cares for you. There are few experiences more debilitating than the feeling that nobody cares for you. Marriages thrive when spouses care affectionately for each other. Dr. John Gottman of the Gottman Institute in Seattle, the nation's foremost marriage research institute, has shown in numerous studies that caring, characterized by a strong sense of friendship in marriage, is a strong predictor of marital success and marital problem-solving (Gottman, 196-203). Family and parenting expert, Dr. Robert Epstein, ranks caring as the top parenting competency. It sets the tone for

all other parenting competencies (see <http://drrobertepstein.com/index.php/parenting>). In churches, the caring that is expressed in the practice of hospitality is a defining mark of vibrant faith communities.

## Turning Age-Specific Programs into Intergenerational Caring Programs

Age-specific programs abound in churches everywhere. Some churches replace them with intergenerational programs, but others take a more organic approach and tweak them to help them take the first steps toward intergenerationality. Start with your adult programs. Challenge at least one adult group to pilot a new idea for you. Offer an in-service to them that will help them appreciate the characteristics of the other generations that are present in your church. After they learn about each of the generations that are absent from their gatherings, ask them to brainstorm the various needs each of these generations currently have. Use the brainstormed list as a catalyst for caring actions that this adult group can offer to one or more of the other generations in your community. Select a new age-specific group in your church each month that will repeat this process.

### Ideas for Caring

Idea	Description
Special Person Day	Many schools have replaced Grandparents Day with Special Person Day as longer distances separate grandparents from grandchildren. On Special Person Day, children in your Sunday School are invited to bring a grandparent or another older adult to the program to experience some key parts of the program and to participate in some special intergenerational activities.

Best Parenting Practices	Help your older members put together a gift book that reflects their parenting wisdom as well as their prayers and best wishes for new parents. Assign some older members to be responsible for giving the book to each young family when they have their first child.
Intergenerational workshops	Build a database of adults who are willing to teach a skill to teens/children. Present the list of skills to children and teens and arrange for ways to safely match up the skilled adults with the youth who want to learn from them.
Sharing meals	Having community meals and receptions connected to church celebrations or just for the sake of getting people together to talk. Encourage participants to mingle across the generations.

## Praying

This essential component of church life nurtures the spiritual life of the whole community and each of its members through experiences of prayer, ritual and blessing. Sunday worship is not the only time that the community prays together. People pray, bless and engage in rituals in their homes, their workplaces, their schools (public or private), their community activities and more. Prayer is communication with God, which can happen anywhere and at any time.

Helping church members pray intergenerationally takes on two forms. People can pray in intergenerational groups or they can pray alone or with peers but with an intergenerational perspective. Praying in intergenerational groups is a way to extend and support the practice of intergenerational Sunday worship. It breaks down barriers that

divide the generations and promotes understanding and appreciation across all generations.

Praying in age-specific groups with an intergenerational perspective can be an initial step towards fuller intergenerationality. For example, when my adult prayer group gathers, there is a temptation to pray for the needs of the members of the group. This is common in churches that are not intentionally intergenerational. The prayer tends to have a distinctively adult character. A group like this can be challenged to remember and pray for, and in the style of, the other generations in the church on a regular basis. When age-specific groups gather in prayer, they benefit from bringing to mind the whole body of Christ along with the prayer needs of each generation that is absent from the group. In this way, they can connect intergenerationally on a spiritual level. Staff members can encourage this by providing prayer workshops or in-services for age-specific groups in the congregation.

### Ideas for Praying

Idea	Description
Prayer Partners	Prayer Partners can happen in a variety of ways. They can be established during sacramental preparation programs. They can be developed for a specific liturgical season. They can be initiated when teens go off to college. In any form, they provide the opportunity to share prayer across the generations.
Secret Santa	Randomly pull name, pray for that person, then send a Christmas card to reveal identity.
Meditation Gong at Intergenerational Learning	Introduce the idea of and the purpose for meditation. Teach a simple meditation skill that is appropriate for all ages. When participants

	hear the gong, it is time for a one-minute period of silent meditation. Over time, the duration of the meditation period can be increased. Always close the meditation period with brief sharing in inter-generational groups about how the meditation helped them to pray about whatever was happening before the meditation. It's also good to encourage families to develop a similar practice of silence at home.
Prayer Mentors for Confirmation	Prepare a group of adults to become prayer mentors. Teach them a variety of prayer forms. Integrate them into the Confirmation program by hosting a prayer for retreat in which the mentors facilitate a variety of prayer workshops.
Prayer shielding	Every child is prayed for by an adult in the congregation.

## Learning

This essential component of church life engages all ages and generations in faith formation experiences that teach Scripture and the Christian tradition, informing and forming disciples of all ages in Christian identity. In recent decades, the component of learning has received more attention in the field of intergenerational faith formation than the other components perhaps because age segregation is most visible and prominent in learning ministries. Sunday schools and religious education programs present the most pressing problems as a result of the extensive nature of age segregation in these programs. The weaknesses associated with an age-

divided community have been experienced most painfully in the learning component.

Models for intergenerational learning abound and are increasing in number regularly. Visit the Intergenerational Faith website of LifelongFaith Associates to learn the details of a variety of learning models: <http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/case-studies.html>

Intergenerational learning models are often structured as monthly gatherings combined with at-home learning. This has been the predominant approach, but more churches are experimenting with and having tremendous success with weekly intergenerational learning programs. Some take a middle road and gather the community twice per month for learning and supplement gathered program with at-home lessons. The general structure of most approaches contain most or all of the following key elements:

- ◆ Warm hospitality punctuated by sharing food
- ◆ Icebreaker opening that connects people to the theme and to each other
- ◆ Family time
- ◆ Time with other families
- ◆ In-depth learning in either intergenerational or age-specific groups
- ◆ Digital media
- ◆ Music
- ◆ Large group and small group processes
- ◆ Summary of learning and life application exercises
- ◆ Take-home materials
- ◆ A multiple-intelligences methodological approach to learning including:
  - Games
  - Movement
  - Lecture
  - Writing
  - Art
  - Conversation
  - Reflection
  - Field trips (indoor and outdoor)
  - Statistical/research evidence

## Ideas for Learning

Idea	Description
Sacramental Preparation	Include parents and sponsors in faith formation sessions. Provide ample time for adult-child interaction. Sacramental preparation is often the easiest way to transition to inter-generational learning because of the higher motivation of parents during a sacrament year.
Event-Centered Learning	The congregation is the curriculum. Build learning sessions around key events that happen during a congregation's annual cycle. Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas are the obvious key events for most churches, but there are others. A church might have a patron saint. Perhaps your church has a special Sunday to celebrate married couples. Vocations Sunday might be an event that emerges in your curriculum. When the events are identified, then a church is prepared to develop learning sessions for the entire community to prepare the congregation to celebrate the events with more meaningful participation.
Family Faith Formation	Some churches empower parents to be the primary teachers of faith for their children and the faith community offers support and resources for the home. This can take the form of full-blown home faith formation where all of the

	formal learning session happen within the family. Other forms combine small numbers of families (4-8 families per group) together for learning sessions once or twice per month (e.g. <i>F.I.R.E.</i> by Kathleen Chesto). Family faith formation models can free up church facilities to be used more for community-building programs rather than learning programs.
Thematic Alignment	This model can promote intergenerational cooperation without intergenerational gatherings. Every month, the whole congregation learns about a common faith theme. Every church meeting and gathering is designed in a way to devote part of the time to learning and reflection upon the common theme. This is effective for communities that use age-specific learning and want to begin to break down barriers between age groups and various church groups.
Food Focus	Host a mid-week meal for the whole community and include a simple learning experience every week.

## Celebrating

This essential component of church life centers on intergenerational Sunday worship. Intergenerational celebration engages all generations in worship and leadership roles, whole community rituals and sacramental rites, milestone rituals, and church year feasts and seasonal rituals. The identity of a faith community is expressed clearly and

meaningfully in the way that they celebrate. Walk into any church on a Sunday morning and you will walk away with a strong sense of that community's values.

Churches that are intentionally intergenerational have broad flexibility in the area of ministry leadership. Every generation contributes to worship leadership in some way. Teens and children are mentored by caring adults into a wide variety of worship roles. They are taught how to lead prayer reverently, sing joyfully, read and proclaim clearly, and engage in ritual purposefully.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Austintown, Ohio has revamped its worship ministry training program so that there is greater integration among all worship leadership roles. In the past lectors, musicians, altar servers, ushers, greeters and Eucharistic ministers were all trained separately and at different times. The only ministries open to children and teens was altar server and greeter. Now the training has two distinct phases.

The first phase is an intergenerational ministry leadership training. Children, teens and adults who want to serve in any worship ministry gather for a one-hour program on ministry leadership with a focus on worship leadership. They begin by sharing their hopes and dreams for worship in their faith community. Then they spend time getting to know each other across the generations. Finally, they are introduced to key principles for worship ministry leadership. At the end of this session, they meet with the leader of their particular ministry and schedule another session to learn the practice of the worship ministry for which they are being trained. Children are now being trained not only for altar server roles, but also for the ministries of greeter and musician. Teen are being trained in every worship ministry.

## Ideas for Celebrating

Idea	Description
Sacramental Rituals	Find ways to actively involve parents in the rituals for sacraments rather than leaving them as spectators. Develop rituals that lead up to a sacramental ritual and include the whole community. For example, an enrollment ritual for children who are preparing for First Communion or Confirmation could include a blessing from the entire congregation several months before the sacramental ritual.
Reverse Trick or Treat on All Saints Day	Gather the whole community for an All Saints celebration on Halloween and include opportunities for children to both give and receive treats. Children can make a craft ahead of time that they will give to older members and older members can give traditional Halloween treats to children. Don't be afraid to include the traditional scary elements of Halloween as a way of "laughing at death." This can help teach the Christian victory over death.
Baptisms at Sunday Worship	Encourage or even require that all baptisms be celebrated in the presence of the whole community. Include an opportunity for the whole community to bless the child and the parents.
Intergenerational Orchestra	Rather than separating the music program into age-specific groups, create an

	intergenerational music ministry that taps into the wide variety of musical genres that are typically enjoyed by each generation.
Presentation of Bibles to Children	Establish a milestone celebration in which children receive from the whole community a Bible of their own.
Preaching	Incorporate inter-generational drama and storytelling groups into the Sunday sermon.
Planting a Church	The Simple Church movement is inspiring the growth of intentionally intergenerational house churches where small and intimate worship services inspires all elements of church celebration to be intergenerational.
Palm Sunday Procession	Families can create hosanna banners at intergenerational learning sessions and carry them in procession at the Palm Sunday worship service.

## Serving

This essential component of church life engages all ages and generations in mission to the world, especially to those who are most poor and vulnerable. It involves caring for all of God's creation and working for justice and advocacy through local and global projects. Service is a sign of faith. It is a characteristic way in which one can identify a Christian community. Intergenerational service is a fuller expression of Christian faith than age-specific service due to its deeper transformative power.

It is rare to find a Christian community that is not engaged in service of some kind. Churches that are becoming intentionally

intergenerational look for opportunities to transform age-specific projects and programs into intergenerational projects and programs. Service trips that may have traditionally involved only two generations (typically teens and adults) now involve three, four or even five generations. Whole families can visit service sites and participate in projects together. With careful planning, the organizing team can develop activities and jobs that are appropriate for each age group. If families will be working directly with at-risk populations, leaders will need to take extra steps to help parents work with their children to prepare them properly and to facilitate the experience in a positive way.

Giving children and teens the opportunity to serve side-by-side with adults, especially their parents, is the most powerful way to form lifelong Christian servants. While service projects sponsored by the church are an essential way to get families and individuals together to experience and learn about Christian service, the overriding purpose of service ministry is to build a culture of service in every household. Parents can be coached on how to identify and nurture the multiple opportunities for service that arise in their homes and neighborhoods each day.

## Ideas for Serving

Ideas	Description
Sponsoring Children	Organizations such as Unbound or World Vision offer opportunities for families to sponsor children in economically challenged regions throughout the world. Develop suggestions for how the whole family can participate in making contributions to the monthly financial gift, write letters together, learn more about the country where the sponsored child lives, keep abreast of current events in

	that part of the world, etc.
Love Our City	Set aside one Saturday or Sunday per month for families to participate in a service project that addresses a need in your local community. Ongoing projects such as community gardens, litter pick-up, or providing meals to a shelter can be relatively easy to organize and sustain.
Monthly Birthday Party	Families know how to celebrate birthdays. Organize twelve groups of families and ask each to provide one birthday celebration per year at a local soup kitchen for any soup kitchen client celebrating a birthday during the month.
Social Media Crash Course	Adults and teens work together to develop a workshop that teaches anyone in the congregation how to effectively navigate social media.
Intergenerational Vacation Bible School Service Experience	Transform Vacation Bible School into a family service experience. Families are assigned to service projects for half of the program each day. The second half of the program features games and activities that help families explore the meaning of Christian service and provide opportunities to share about their service experiences.

## Conclusion

Every component of church life is ripe for intergenerationality. The stakes are high! The world is hungry for a renewed glimpse of God, one that is relevant and meaningful. Bringing the generations together for experiences of caring, praying, learning, celebrating and serving will not only renew your congregation, but it will also give the world a more complete glimpse of the body of Christ.

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## Digital Media for Ministry Brief: Community and Organizational Life

Kyle Matthew Olive

This is the second in a series of three briefs about digital media for ministry in areas other than faith formation. As I wrote in the introduction to the first piece, which covered communications and evangelism tools like websites, e-newsletters, and social media, my experience talking to congregational educators all over the country is that they are being asked to exercise increasing leadership in other areas of church life. Is *your* position or role expanding in scope? We want the training you receive in these pages to expand as well.

This issue's brief will cover tools for what I'm calling "community and organizational life." By this I mean those tasks that help keep the engines of our congregations firing on all cylinders: scheduling meetings and building usage, sharing files and other resources, collaborating on

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documents, etc. Note that I will not be covering church membership database software like ACS or bookkeeping and payroll software like Intuit. Most churches use these essential tools already, and I'm not expert on them. However, I can recommend a good place to compare them if you're looking to start or change. Here are links to infographics from software reviewer Capterra on the most-used tools in both categories:

[bit.ly/ChurchMgt](http://bit.ly/ChurchMgt) and [bit.ly/ChurchAcct](http://bit.ly/ChurchAcct). If you're already using this sort of software, it's worth looking to see if it supports some of the tasks we'll be discussing, like scheduling. On the other hand, the lightweight and usually free tools covered below will often do a better job at simple tasks. Beware of any software promising to be "one tool to rule them all."

If this sounds like an introduction to a short course in IT for nonprofit management, well, I can only defer to a bishop who recently told a large church gathering that he believes most churches are "over-led and under-managed." If you'd like to upgrade your toolbox for collaborating with others—for not just discerning but actually executing your congregation's mission—then this is the article for you. As another colleague recently said, the Holy Spirit isn't going to do our paperwork for us.

## Big Picture: Lead Me Not Into the Critical Path

When I was a graduate student in an engineering research group, I learned my first (mostly secondhand) lessons in management. My advisor was a soon-to-be-tenured young professor overseeing a substantial team of students and staff on an unusually wide array of projects. Unfortunately for him, most of us were poorly prepared for some essential aspects of our work. Who knew how to do everything we needed to get done? Paul. So what did we do? We bugged him so much he could never attend to his own work. Again and

again I heard Paul say, "my goal is to remove myself from your critical path."

A critical path is the series of steps required to finish a job. If I'm editing this week's worship bulletin from home and the music insert files are all on the organist's computer at the church, then the organist just stepped into (or, rather, got dragged into) my critical path. If a large committee I lead is using email to schedule a meeting, imagine how many times I'm likely to enter the critical path before a final decision is reached? ("OK, I'm sending this email to try out those same times the following week. . .")

Technology can be a reliable and indefatigable ally to avoid getting tangled in the sacred ties that bind our communities together as we carry out our missions. It does this chiefly by *granting access* to information (which keeps the person responsible for it out of the critical path of those who need to retrieve it) and by *passively collecting* information (which keeps the person responsible for it out of the critical path of those who need to contribute to it). Some tools can do both of these tasks.

Of course, the technology can't plan our work for us; it's a tool, not a panacea. But with the help of some of the tools below, you can streamline the critical path toward all kinds of common organizational tasks at your church.

## Tool Profiles: Three Essential Tasks

### Scheduling: Doodle, SignUpGenius, Google Calendar

None of the tools I will introduce here is easier to get up and running with than **Doodle**. And probably none is more urgently needed in churches where it (or something like it) isn't already in common use. Doodle allows you to create a simple poll to get feedback about when to schedule a meeting. It's easy to use, pleasantly graphical, and doesn't require any

special accounts for you or any of the people you're polling.





To get started, simply go to [doodle.com](http://doodle.com) and click "Schedule an event." You'll be asked to name it and provide some contact information. Doodle then asks you what days and timeslots you'd like to offer as options. After another simple question or two, your poll is ready, and you have a link that you can

email to potential participants. Thus, you stay out of the critical path, because Doodle collects the responses for you.

I try pretty hard not to overhype these tools, but believe me when I say that Doodle has improved my life dramatically as a minister who schedules a *lot* of meetings. If you'd like to see it in action, check out my short how-to video at [bit.ly/DoodleHowto](http://bit.ly/DoodleHowto).

**Doodle**

April 2015

	Tue 7	Wed 8	Thu 9
	7:00 PM – 8:00 PM	7:30 AM – 8:30 AM	7:00 PM – 8:00 PM
<b>3 participants</b>			
 Kyle	✓	✓	✓
 John	✓	✓	
 Lisa	✓		✓
 Randall	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3	2	2

There's a way you can turn a Doodle poll into a sign-up form, but for that related task you're probably better off with SignUpGenius. This tool requires a bit more work to use, but the payoff is a few more powerful features. Here, from the SignUpGenius website, are the kinds of sign-ups you can create forms for:

- ◆ One time: Takes place at one time at one location (e.g., a potluck or party)
- ◆ Recurring: Takes place at one location on recurring days (e.g., snacks every Sunday)
- ◆ Time Slots: Involves people selecting from a range of times (e.g., a parent teacher conference)

- ◆ Custom: Involves multiple days, times, or locations (e.g., volunteers for sports games)
- ◆ No Specific Date: Does not take place on a specific day (e.g., a donation sign up)

In particular, I like that SignUpGenius includes an automated reminder email feature. This keeps you out of the critical path in both the planning phase (collecting sign-ups) and the execution phase (reminding volunteers). So if you need to schedule a season's worth of snack providers for a weekly class, or two week's worth of meals for a family with a new baby or a serious illness, head over to [signupgenius.com](http://signupgenius.com).

## Sign-Up Genius

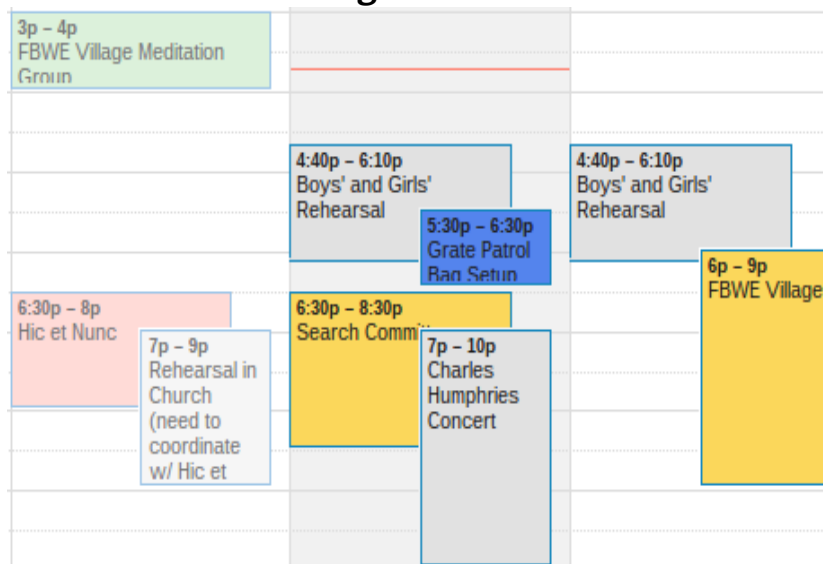
St. Swithin's Church  
**MEALS FOR THE SMITH FAMILY**  
 Please sign up to bring a meal to the Smith family as they adjust to life with a newborn. Remember that Jane is allergic to shellfish. You will receive a reminder email in advance of your selected date.  
 CREATED BY: Kyle Oliver CONTACT

Date	Available Slot	Sign Up
3/2/2015 (Mon.)	Dinner	Sign Up
3/3/2015 (Tue.)	Dinner	Sign Up
3/4/2015 (Wed.)	Dinner	Sign Up
3/5/2015 (Thu.)	Dinner	Sign Up
3/6/2015 (Fri.)	Dinner	Sign Up

If you've collected a bunch of scheduling information and need to make it accessible to many people, consider setting up a Google Calendar to manage that access. Churches with elaborate liturgical schedules may want to use a Google Calendar to advertise daily services on their websites. Many congregations also use Google Calendars either internally or publicly to keep track of which rooms of the church are scheduled to be used at which times. The parish where I serve color-codes events by room to help us keep track of complicated building usage.

In addition to sharing the information stored in your calendar by embedding the calendar on a web page or sharing a link to it, you can create multiple administrators to allow different (trusted) individuals to reserve available rooms by creating a new event directly. If you take this approach, you'll definitely want to have someone "tending" the calendar every week or so to make sure all reservations make sense and conflicts get worked out.

## Google Calendar



## Evaluating: Google Forms, Formstack, SurveyMonkey

As church educators, readers of this publication know that continuing evaluation of programs is essential to their improvement. We've all been to those events where organizers frantically pass out a paper evaluation as the session wraps up. Responses to such surveys are often rushed—and often illegible. Online forms sent out after the event may not garner such high response rates (your audience is no longer captive), but they are much easier to compile. And my hunch is that sleeping on it for a night of two usually improves our critical perspective on events we have attended.

For those with a Google account, the quickest way I know of to create a simple evaluation is Google Forms. When logged in at [drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com), simply click new and select Google Forms. The interface is very simple and allows you to create questions of the following types:

- ◆ Text
- ◆ Paragraph text

- ◆ Multiple choice (choose one)
- ◆ Checkboxes (choose all that apply)
- ◆ Choose from a list
- ◆ Scale (choose number scale and optional text labels)
- ◆ Grid (like Doodle)
- ◆ Date
- ◆ Time

You can tweak the design by choosing a pre-made template or uploading your own art. Multi-page forms are also within possible, including complex multi-path forms that take the user to certain pages corresponding to certain answers to the questions.

Once your form is ready to go, you can send a link to participants or embed the form on a webpage somewhere. The time stamped results from each participant will be entered as a new line in a Google Sheets spreadsheet that the program will create for you. You can do all sorts of analysis on the spreadsheet (pro tip: make a copy of it), but be sure to check out the "Responses > Summary of responses" menu item from your form editor window. It will automatically create a (pretty attractive) summary of your new data.

### Google Forms

How would you rate your overall conference experience?



How would you rate the depth of your learning from the conference?



Of course, where there's a free tool from Google, there's usually a more powerful freemium tool elsewhere online (free to use in basic mode; premium functionality costs extra). In the "easy online forms" category, some standouts are Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), an essential tool for more academic survey research, Formstack ([www.formstack.com](http://www.formstack.com)), and Wufoo ([www.wufoo.com](http://www.wufoo.com)). All of them will do some data collection and analysis for you so you don't have to. In the end, remember that the best tool for you is the tool you will actually use; for my money (or not, in this case), no tool is simpler, faster, and better integrated into how I already work than Google Forms. I have a demo video here as well: [bit.ly/FormsHowto](http://bit.ly/FormsHowto).

## File Editing and Sharing: Google Drive and Dropbox

If you're sensing that I'm a Google apologist, you're not wrong. This isn't the place to dive into the arguments about online security, privacy, "big data," and whether Google will continue to live up to its motto of "don't be evil" (or if it ever did in the first place). If you want an accessible entry point into that conversation, this brief piece by *The Guardian's* Pratap Chatterjee is a good place to start: [bit.ly/GuardianBigData](http://bit.ly/GuardianBigData). For better or worse, I have made the decision to make my Google account as secure as possible (using two-factor authentication, which requires a password and a specially-delivered code that Google texts me at log-in time) and commit to making the most of it to collaborate as efficiently as possible.

Speaking of efficiency (or lack thereof), probably my second biggest collaboration pet peeve—after meetings scheduled via reply-all emails—is dealing with multiple versions of the same document being passed around by a group of contributors and editors. How many times have you found a file like "worship\_Bulletin\_Feb8\_v3\_FINAL.doc" and muttered a desperate prayer before sending

150 copies to the printer? Google Docs is another free Google tool accessible at [drive.google.com](http://drive.google.com) that can give everyone the access they need to contribute. Collaboration in this paradigm splits the critical path into parallel routes, along which everyone can carry their particular load, making their own contributions and editing and commenting on others' work. The alternative critical path (passing around Word documents) is a kind of relay race where you're always in danger of carrying the wrong baton and having to double-back to pick up the correct one.

My worship bulletin example above may not be entirely fair, because Google Docs is probably not the ideal tool for this task. Although the commenting and editing functionalities in Docs are now as good as Microsoft Word's, the formatting options are not as powerful. (Plus, many worship bulletins are complicated enough that they need to be laid out using design software rather than word processing software anyway.) But for projects where people are working together on text, Google Docs can't be beat. So consider this tool for the following kinds of church collaboration: meeting minutes, pastoral or stewardship letters, newsletter articles, and notes from/during brainstorming sessions

Of course, your Google Drive can store more kinds of files than just Google Docs, Google Forms, and Google Sheets (the ones we've discussed so far). In fact, it can store any kind of file. This means you can create folders "in the cloud" for shared access to not just documents but also images, sound files, video, etc.

Church staffs who work exclusively on church computers might not need this tool. But those who need to telecommute on occasion, and those who work with volunteers and committee member who don't have access to church computers, will find it a lifesaver. For people who don't wave the Google banner, Dropbox is another excellent file-sharing tool, and it now also supports shared file editing (though not as seamlessly). Dropbox isn't quite as generous with free accounts though;

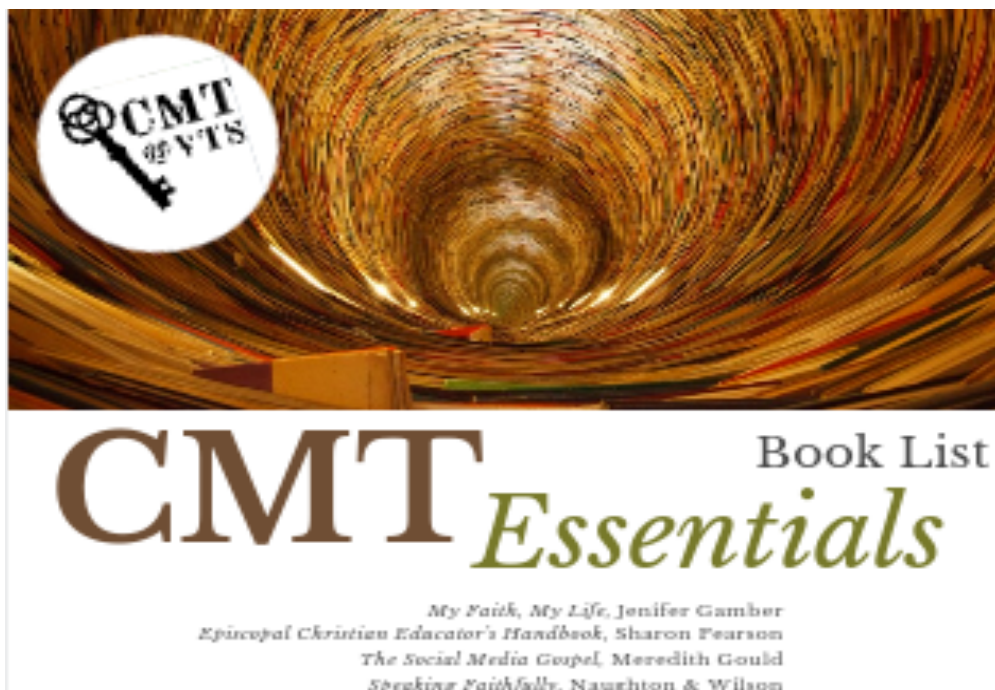
you get 2 GB of storage to start, compared to Google Drive's 15 GB.

The examples we've discussed have been a little text-heavy, but if you follow online trends you know that communities increasingly use images to promote opportunities to be involved. If, like me, you're not a wizard in Adobe Photoshop but still need to create attractive graphics online and in print, let me heartily recommend Canva.

Create a free account at [canva.com](http://canva.com) and start from one of their attractive and creative free templates. You can upload your own photos, or take advantage of their built-in library for only \$1 per image. Best of all, the editing happens in your browser—no special software to install. If you get on their mailing list, you'll receive regular links to design tutorials that will help you improve your skills. Consider creating a church account so everyone can access the same designs in one place; you can't simultaneously edit them, but otherwise Canva can serve as a sort of Google Drive for image creation. Here's my video tutorial for Canva: [bit.ly/CanvaHowto](http://bit.ly/CanvaHowto).

## Bottom Line: Find Tools that Everyone Will Use

Let me close by reiterating two related points: the best collaboration tools are often the simplest, and they are always the tools that your collaborators will actually use. I've seen lots of attempts at online collaboration fail because the people involved couldn't or didn't want to create a new account on a new service, or couldn't figure out how to use some arcane feature of an expensive software suite for which there was a much simpler (and usually free) alternative. After "let's work together," our most important motto in church community and organizational life should be "let's use the right tool for the right job." You'll know it when you find it, because it will feel like someone designed it especially for you, to (help) solve your everyday ministry problems. And if you have a favorite I didn't mention, please tell your friends (and tell me: [cmt@vts.edu](mailto:cmt@vts.edu)). Share and enjoy!





## Congregational-Based Mentoring: Why Bother?

Marlene Bogard

**D**on, an adult in his 50's, felt rejected by the 16-year old boy he was mentoring. Don called me, the congregational-based mentoring coordinator and said, "I quit." He offered these reasons: Jeff, the youth he mentored, acted distant, came late to mentor/mentee events, and often smelled like cigarette smoke. Don did not like the group of kids Jeff hung around with. Don grew weary of trying to connect with 16 year old Jeff, because every time he saw him, Jeff appeared gruff and angry.

To be honest, as mentoring coordinator, I was pretty angry with Don. I thought that Jeff, who already was an at-risk youth because of a family situation, now had one more adult who appeared not to care. My response to Don was, "Give it a second chance. Think about this decision for another week."

He responded, "I just can't invest myself in a relationship like this when Jeff doesn't want to put any energy into it. He is already a troubled youth, why bother?"

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Marlene Bogard is Executive Director of Mennonite Women USA.

At the time, I was so shocked and disappointed that a mature Christian man would turn his back on Jeff that I didn't know what else to say. . .

Today however, I would say to Don: "Guess what Don, you missed the point—congregational-based mentoring is not about you. But it is about loving the hard to love. It's about being a mature Christian presence in a life that is rocked by peer pressure and hormones and impulsive decision making. It's about taking time to listen (non-judgmentally) to struggles and frustrations. It's about being available, even when you are uncomfortable. Mentoring a youth is about God's timetable, not yours."

Don's story may be unusual. I hope so! I know there are many stories of how faithful adults have caught the vision of congregational mentoring in order to impact the lives of youth in positive ways.

## The Most Important Questions

Over the past several decades, youth ministry has been deemed successful when the numbers are good or when a dynamic youth leader brings such charisma to the youth group that youth show up excited and engaged with the activities planned. Failure happens if few or no kids show up.

But what if the most important questions about youth ministry are not "How many youth came?" or "What shall we do with them when they do show up?" or "Did they have fun?"

What if the most important questions are, "What is the nature of our community? What are the discipleship skills we want our youth to have? How might our church community exhibit those skills in such a way that attracts youth and draws them to inspiring mentors in faith?"

## Mentoring in Scripture and Tradition

Mentoring itself is not a new concept. In Homer's book, *The Odyssey*, Ulysses appointed Mentor to be a watching, guiding presence in his son's life. Although the term is not mentioned specifically in the scriptures, these kind of faith-transmission relationships are seen throughout the Bible. Samuel's mother gave him over as a boy to Eli so that he could observe and learn from Eli's life as a priest. Ruth saw in Naomi something she wished to model her life after and adopted Naomi as her guide and faith mentor. The relationships that developed between Jesus and his disciples display an obvious mentoring model as conversations about belief, baptism, salvation and spirituality happened in the midst of travel, meals, and work. Paul's letters to Timothy depict the special interest and care he took to encourage Timothy in his developing faith. As each generation of people in the Bible discerned what it meant to be God's people, they learned from the wisdom and experience of those who came before them and engaged in faith transmission with them.

For some faith traditions, the role of godparents serves as a model for mentoring and this "mentor" is assigned at an infant's birth or baptism. In other traditions, congregational-based mentoring is any relationship where a younger person is intentionally linked with a mature Christian adult for the purposes of friendship, support and the modeling of faithful Christian living. Congregational-based mentoring is different than programs offered via social service agencies, because it is explicitly about passing on the faith from one generation to the next.

## Why Bother with Mentoring?

Don's haunting question, "Why bother?" invites us to explore how congregational-based mentoring can provide an important foundation for helping youth grow into healthy adults, and Christian adults at that!

### Teenagers have less caring adults in their lives than in the past.

This is the nature of current culture. Parents often work long hours away from home. Grandparents and other extended family are often absent due to geography. Families today are of many designs, often with only one parent in the home. We have begun to depend on digital connections to help both youth and adults to stay in touch with each other via virtual community, but not embodied face-to-face community. Texting does provide for checking in and quick communication, but it comes up short in real-time listening and human presence. Many youth are surrounded by positive role-models and leaders with school teachers and coaches, Sunday school teachers and youth sponsors, pastors and neighbors. All of these relationships are valuable, but not all of them are able to offer the personal nurturing relationship of a mentor.

The Search Institute reports that one of the strongest predictors that youth will remain in present and active in congregations as they grow up is if they have three to five quality friendships with mature Christian adults *other* than their parents in the congregation. This also means that youth who plug into youth group but don't develop close friendships with mature Christian adults, are less likely to be in the church ten years later.

Thus mentors have a unique role—to encourage a lifelong faith relationship with Jesus Christ. A Sunday school teacher or parent, while also investing in this goal, is also paying attention to other aspects of their roles

of teaching and parenting. A mentor is not going to be overly concerned about parenting issues such as curfews and cars, school assignments and grades. The mentor's agenda is simple and unique: offer spiritual friendship and support.

### Mentoring has the potential to change the trajectory of youth.

Healthy mentoring provides youth with opportunities for personal growth that they might not otherwise have. If youth are headed in a negative direction, a positive relationship with a caring non-family member can help ward off trouble. When comparing youth who participate in mentoring programs and those in similar circumstances who don't, researchers at *childtrends.org* have found that mentored youth:

- ◆ Have fewer unexcused absences from school
- ◆ Have a better chance of going on to higher education
- ◆ Have better attitudes about school
- ◆ Demonstrate better attitudes toward family
- ◆ Are less likely to become physically aggressive
- ◆ Are less likely to become involved with drugs and alcohol
- ◆ Have more positive social attitudes and relationships

### Mentoring improves family relationships.

Even in the "best" of families, tension, anxiety, and conflict may arise simply because of the challenges of daily life. Adolescence can be bewildering and lonely, even if a youth has a supportive family. The tension in a youth-parent relationship may be decreased when the youth has a relationship with another trusted adult. A youth will find a relationship with a mentor to be neutral territory, a place

where they may be able to try out new thoughts in a safe zone, without parental agenda.

## **Mentoring encourages spiritual growth and Christian discipleship.**

Mentoring fits in well with the church's chief mission: disciple-making. Jesus calls us to both be and make disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. Nearly 80% of all Christians became Christians as youth, and lifelong behavior and ethics are generally formed before 13. It bodes well for the church to focus on the faith formation of children and youth. Youth workers and other adults who invest in the lives of young people create lasting impressions that are vital to the lifelong choices youth must make. Accountability, responsibility, and faith formation happen in the midst of personal, trusted relationships. These intimate connections between young people and committed Christian adults provides impetus for sustained, growing faith.

## **Mentoring provides belonging.**

Youth yearn to be accepted by adults. Only in our culture and only in recent history has society expected adolescents to separate emotionally from their parents and other significant adults. Unfortunately, many churches pride themselves on having a thriving youth ministry that actually isolates youth from their parents and other caring adults. If we remove teenagers from corporate worship, or we program for youth-only experiences, we may be promoting the idea that adults are old-fashioned, out-of-touch and not worth listening to. Walt Mueller suggests that "Instead, we should be giving students the opportunity to rub elbows with the diverse spectrum of people in the body of Christ, including those whose age and experience makes them a valuable resource simply because they are older and wiser." (*Hold Me in YouthWorker Journal* March,

April, 2007). Youth deeply long to belong, and the Christian faith community is a perfect place to model multi-generational inclusion and belonging.

## **Mentors and Parents as Friends**

This relationship invites a number of questions: Is it okay for a mentor to be a close personal friend of the parent? Can a relative be a mentor? These kinds of mentoring relationships may provide additional challenges that are not immediately apparent.

Sharla became a mentor to Emma, the 16 year old daughter of some very good friends. After a few heart-to-heart conversations with Emma about her college plans, Sharla needed to re-evaluate the role she would play with both Emma and her parents.

Sharla decided she would not function as an extension of Emma's parents. She knew Emma's parent's beliefs and values as well as their hopes and dreams for Emma with regard to college. It was not Sharla's role to make sure that Emma met her parent's expectations. Sharla's role was to listen to Emma and help her discern her future.

Sharla also decided she should never share any of their conversations with Emma's parents. In order to lay a foundation of trust between her and Emma, she told Emma that what was said during their meetings would be confidential, just between them. An exception, of course, was if Emma had indicated evidence of addictions, substance abuse, hurting others or herself.

Like all mentors, Sharla came to realize that her first loyalty was to Emma, her personal and faith development, not to her parents, the pastor, or anyone else. She wanted to support her young friend for who she was, as an individual, not for who her parents were.

## Best Practices of Mentors

1. Mentors and youth agree to a pattern of meetings that works best for each other. This may mean once a month, or once a quarter, with the addition of an informal conversation weekly, at church or a coffee shop.
2. Mentors tend the relationship. They set the meetings up and manage the interpersonal boundaries.
3. Be safe. Mentoring programs are structured to provide for a higher level of interaction between mentors and mentees, often one-to-one. Meet in a public place; make sure parents are fully informed of where you are and when the youth will be home.
4. Be authentic and approachable. Be an adult who has made some mistakes, but who can demonstrate growth in spite of it.
5. Be attentive and model good listening, with eye contact, nods, and smiles.
6. Be anchored. Be a person who has a solid foundation in his or her faith.
7. The relationship that develops is durable and persistent. Never give up!
8. The congregation provides program structures such as a mentoring coordinator that help support all of the above.

## How to Launch and Nurture a Mentoring Relationship

Juan was hesitant to be a mentor. He certainly had the heart for it, as he had been mentored by a vibrant Christian man all through his high school years and knew the power of a supportive adult friendship. But as a quiet introvert, Juan often wondered exactly how to connect with his assigned youth, as sometimes

even starting a conversation with a teenager seemed awkward.

Here are some suggestions for Juan, and anyone else who wants to mentor today's youth:

- ◆ Ask an open-ended question: "Tell me about. . ." "What happens if..." "Describe your. . ."
- ◆ Pose a "would you rather" situation: "Would you rather eat a triple cheeseburger or an apple pie?" "Would you rather go skydiving or bungee-jumping?" Keeping it light-hearted or extreme adds to the fun and the crazy responses.
- ◆ Pose questions that do not require an answer. Begin with a "wondering question." "I wonder about. . ."
- ◆ Share a personal experience, and then ask for a similar one. "My funniest story about a dog is. . . , what about your pets?"
- ◆ Role Play. Obviously, this would be for the bold and fearless, and those with a flair for the dramatic.
- ◆ Discuss a school or catechism assignment. This is a perfect opportunity to talk about your faith.
- ◆ Prepare for a church event together. Offer to help with a youth-fundraiser, teach them how to lead worship, sign up to be ushers together, or greet folks on Sunday morning.
- ◆ Include them in your family. Invite them for a sit-down dinner or let them hang out with you informally.
- ◆ Ask about their friends! For most youth—friends are the most important group in their lives.

- ◆ Don't disclose everything about your personal life. Be vulnerable but do not be graphic!
- ◆ Pay attention to the small stuff. Know and remember if they are trying out for a play, when their finals are, their favorite foods, birthday.
- ◆ Be bold in affirmation. Remember to affirm them for who they are, not what they have accomplished.
- ◆ Let them hear you talk about your faith and live it. Offer to share your story of your own personal faith journey. Include struggles, questions, and victories.
- ◆ Pray together. If using words is uncomfortable, sit in silence together. Or use a prayer book or devotional guide.
- ◆ Be up front about boundaries of time and money. Mentoring is primarily about building a friendship, not about spending money. Some mentoring programs have spoken rules about youth and adults paying their own way, except for birthdays and Christmas.

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## Cultivating An Intercessory Prayer Ministry

Frank Mercadante

**A**fter graduating from college, I was hired as a full-time youth minister in a parish that had no previous history of youth ministry. With no adults to train, teens to work with, or programs to maintain, I had a lot of time on my hands! Figuring I better look busy (and spiritual), I began each day by praying for every single registered teen by name. I certainly wasn't going through the motions—I cared about reaching teens with the gospel, and I believed in the power of prayer. However, to be totally honest, I am not sure I would have invested as much time prayerfully interceding for these teens if I had to begin the job with both feet running. Because of my unique situation, I stumbled “by accident” upon a truth that never left me—prayer works! In reality, I couldn't have possibly, in any way, better used my time.

During the course of that first year, I witnessed what could have only come from God. Our first youth gathering began that late summer with a meager twelve teens. By the end of the school year that same gathering was bustling with over one hundred and twenty young people. The one

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thousand percent growth was certainly exciting, however, numbers rarely reveal the whole plot line. The real story was the culture of discipleship being formed. It began with young person after young person trying to express to me in their own words either a faint spiritual ache, or longing for more, or of a hole that this world was too tiny to fully satisfy. Some articulated it profoundly like Steve, who after listing a litany of accomplishments confessed, "I have everything, why do I feel empty and that something foundational is missing." Others, like Bart, intimated it more profanely, grunting, "Frank, my life sucks!"

As I was specifically praying each day that the Lord would prepare their hearts for the gospel and grow into disciples of Jesus Christ, many expressed a longing for Jesus and joined discipleship groups to learn how to know, love, and serve him. It seemed so apparent to me that this spiritual hunger for a relationship with God was a direct answer to the hours of prayer in behalf of these teens. The Holy Spirit was transforming many lives and the culture of our faith community.

Since that time, I have been adamant about developing an intentional and organized intercessory prayer ministry in every youth ministry I have helped develop. Intercessory prayer does not equate to auto magical ministry success, nor is it the only important focus to growing a life-changing ministry with teens. You can pray your heart out and still do ineffective youth ministry if you are not attentive to other essential aspects of youth ministry, including a clear mission, team approach, evangelization, authentic Christian community, etc., etc. Intercessory prayer enhances the impact of these activities. It can be likened to the fertilizer that increases the yield of a crop. Over the years, I have clearly witnessed a palpable sense of God's presence and power in those congregations that built their youth ministries on the bedrock of intercession compared to those who only gave it lip service. In the end, a prayer-less ministry is a powerless ministry.

The following steps for building an intercessory prayer ministry are situated

within the context of youth ministry. The concepts, however, can be adapted and applied to many church ministry contexts, including children's ministry, family ministry, and larger congregational ministry.

## Defining Intercession

Intercession is a prayer of supplication, or asking. Supplication prayer has two general forms of expression: petition and intercession. Petition is asking in behalf of one's self. We transition from petition to intercession when we shift our prayer focus from our own needs to those of others. Intercession is the act of asking in behalf of another or others. It literally means "to go between." Anytime we pray for another's need we are interceding.

Beyond a basic definition, Walter Wink describes intercession as "spiritual defiance of what is in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current contradictory forces. It breathes the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of present reality." (298)

The Bible provides numerous examples and references to the ministry of intercession. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, the Apostle Paul outlines the centrality of intercessory prayer in the life of the believer when he states: "First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity."

Another important example in the Bible is Nehemiah, who deeply understood the value and power of intercessory prayer. Nehemiah was a Jewish layman and worked as a cupbearer for the Persian King Artaxerxes after the exile. Deeply moved by the fact that Jerusalem laid in physical and spiritual ruins, Nehemiah was granted permission by the king to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's story suggests a helpful template for a leader's dependence on God through the ministry of intercession.

The Book of Nehemiah is set in motion when Nehemiah gets wind of the situation in Jerusalem and of his surviving countrymen living there. The headlines are dreadful. Disgraced and disillusioned, the residents of Jerusalem remain vulnerable and defenseless, as their walls lay gutted and exposed. Nehemiah's knee jerk reaction was to turn to God in prayer. "When I heard this report, I began to weep and continued mourning for several days; I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." (Nehemiah 1:4 NAB)

Nehemiah's prayer, recorded in the remainder of chapter one, concludes with, "O Lord, may your ear be attentive to my prayer and that of all your willing servants who revere your name. Grant success to your servant this day, and let him find favor with this man." (Nehemiah 1:11)

Shortly afterwards, Nehemiah was serving wine to King Artaxerxes and his prayers were answered. The king sensed sadness in Nehemiah and probed. Nehemiah revealed his despair over the situation in Jerusalem. The king responded by asking, "What is it, then, that you wish?" Nehemiah paused and prayed. Then, he asked the King if he might travel to Judah and rebuild the city. Nehemiah's initial prayer was answered as the king gave both permission and provision for task (Nehemiah 2:8). Later, while immersed in the work, Nehemiah continued to depend on the power of prayer while navigating the many obstacles that threatened to halt the progress of rebuilding (Nehemiah 4:3).

Like Nehemiah, when seeking to rebuild a parish culture into a youth-friendly, disciple-making experience, we must invest and depend on the power of prayer. Therefore, one of our first tasks is developing a supportive intercessory prayer base. As the psalmist states, "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build." (Psalm 127:1)

The three basic steps to cultivating a powerful Intercessory Prayer Ministry include *recognizing, organizing, and strategizing*. Let's explore each in greater detail.

## Step One: Recognize the Value of Intercession

Sometimes we fail to recognize the value of what we already possess. It's easy to miss what's below the surface. Sometimes, that lack of recognition impacts our lives in a big way. Take, for example, the man who sold a painting at a Pennsylvania flea market to a collector for four dollars. The price seemed fair. The painting was of a drab country scene. The old carved frame surrounding the canvas was of greater value, if one can say that about a four-dollar piece of merchandise. However, the seller was unaware that behind the frame stood an "unspeakably fresh copy" of a first printing of the Declaration of Independence. The document was beautifully preserved as a result of being sealed and folded up. Not long afterwards, the new owner received \$2,420,000 at an auction for his four-dollar investment.

The new owner struck oil. But, consider the guy who sold him the painting! He forfeited his chance to be a multi-millionaire for a measly four bucks. What a tragedy! If only he knew what had in that banal piece of art. How different his life would be.

Too often, this story describes those of us in church leadership. We fail to recognize the value and power of what God gives us in intercessory prayer. Sure, prayer can seem monotonous and mundane at times, but hidden beneath the familiar is world history changing power. Leadership teams that deeply understand this, change the history of their young people and congregations. As Walter Wink wisely said, "History belongs to the intercessors."

Therefore, the first step in developing an impacting intercessory prayer base involves recognizing the value and power of this God-given gift to the church. Not all congregations begin with this conviction. We may need to do some essential preparatory work before moving to the second step. An Intercessory Prayer Ministry may be such a radical idea for some parishes that the best place to start

might be a series of workshops, homilies, newsletters or bulletin articles that motivate, illustrate, and instruct church members on the importance, value, and priority of intercessory prayer.

## Step Two: Recruit and Organize An Intercessory Prayer Team

The second step involves cultivating a team of four to ten individuals whose principal ministry is to organize consistent and focused prayer on behalf of the congregation's youth and youth ministry. The team's role includes praying, but also the development of prayer goals, initiatives, and efforts that mobilize the entire congregation in prayerful intercession.

Writing to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul requested their prayer support for his missionary efforts, stating: "Pray perseveringly, be attentive to prayer, and pray in a spirit of thanksgiving. Pray for us, too, that God would provide us with an opening to proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am a prisoner. Pray that I might speak it clearly, as I must." (Colossians 4:2-4).

Paul's general solicitation clearly demonstrates that every member of the Body of Christ is called and expected to intercede in behalf of others. Many of those involved in the prayer efforts of an intercessory team will be simply answering the general call to prayer. However, some members possess the gift of intercession. How does one know if they possess this gift? Some common indicators include an almost reflexive response of prayer to problems or needs of others, deep concern for people or situations with whom they may have little or no personal connection. Additionally, they do not quickly grow weary from intercession and may even get lost in time while praying for others. Moreover, the gifted intercessor may feel a sense of leading or divine aiming of their prayers for others. Finally, and most importantly, they are known by others as people whose prayers seem to

always work and get answered. In other words, their prayers bear fruit.

Often, those with a gift for intercession are not obvious to church leadership. Anthony de Mello wisely describes the irony of their power and anonymity: "It is only at the end of this world that we shall realize how the destinies of persons and nations have been shaped, not so much by the external actions of powerful men and by events that seemed inevitable, but by the quiet, silent, irresistible prayer of persons the world will never know" (72).

When assembling an Intercessory Ministry Team, we can locate those who have a particular gift of intercession by asking church members who they go to when they really need prayer? Additionally, we should consider individuals who possess some of the previous mentioned characteristics. An Intercessory Prayer Team, however, need not be comprised of only those who possess the gift of intercession. Most intercessory teams include those who are being faithful to the general call to intercession and those who have a gift for intercession.

Critical to every intercessory ministry team is a team leader who has excellent administrative skills. The team leader has the responsibility of leading the group in developing a practical strategy and organized effort towards harnessing the prayers of the community. The leader's role is to ensure that the development of a consistent intercessory prayer base is built, developed, and maintained to lend sufficient prayer support for all young people, youth workers, programs, activities and efforts of the youth ministry.

I have worked with some prayer leaders who were exceptional in their personal practice of intercession. They had the gift, could get lost in intercession, and were known as "mountain movers" in faith and prayer. However, they were not particularly organized and were ineffectual as team leaders because they lacked the essential administrative and communication skills to get others productively involved. A good team leader is able to administrate the goals and prayer efforts of the team.

## **Intercessory Prayer Team Leader Role Description (Example)**

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### **Purpose**

To recruit, manage, and lead dedicated parishioners who will form an Intercessory Prayer Team to design, build and maintain a system to ensure sufficient prayer support for our youth, families of teens, youth workers, youth ministry goals, programs, activities and special intentions of the youth ministry.

### **Desired Characteristics and Skills**

- A personal belief in the power of prayer
- A dedication to daily prayer
- Highly motivated with an ability to recruit others
- Well organized
- Good written and oral communication

### **General Responsibilities**

- Recruit members to form the Intercessory Prayer Team
- Guide the team as they design and build a sustainable intercessory prayer system
- Encourage the team to recruit prayer members from various parish organizations
- Promote intercessory prayer within the congregation for the benefit youth and the youth ministry
- Ensure effective communication between the intercessory team and the youth ministry and parish
- Oversee all Intercessory Team projects, programs and meetings
- Network with existing prayer groups and actively look for new avenues of prayer support

### **Monthly Time Commitment**

- Team Meeting (2 hours)
- Planning and preparation (4 hours)

### **Training/Resources**

- Intercessory Prayer Training In-service (3 hours)

## **Intercessory Prayer Team Member Role Description (Example)**

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### **Purpose**

To help design, build and sustain a system to ensure prayer support for our youth, families of teens, youth workers, youth ministry goals, programs, activities and special intentions of the youth ministry.

### **Desired Characteristics and Skills**

- A personal belief in the power of prayer
- A dedication to daily prayer
- Commitment to intercede through prayer on behalf of our youth
- Ability to work with others

### **General Responsibilities**

- Pray daily for youth ministry and the youth it serves.
- Actively participate in team meetings to develop strategic goals and design a system that will sustain parishioner's involvement in regular prayer for every teen, families of teens, youth workers, youth ministry goals, programs, activities and special intentions of the youth ministry.
- Recruit parishioners from various groups and general membership to adopt a specific youth and to pray daily on their behalf.
- Actively participate in or lead on-going programs designed to improve and sustain intercessory prayer on behalf of all involved in youth ministry.

### **Monthly Time Commitment**

- Team meeting (2 hours.)
- Preparation and special projects (1-2 hours)

### **Training/ Resources**

- Intercessory Prayer Training In-service (3 hours)

## Step 3: Strategize Goals

The third step to developing an effective Intercessory Prayer Ministry involves the development of prayer goals. Establishing, working towards, and achieving goals are a common experience for most of us. Many ministries have well thought out mission statements with corresponding practical goals. We cannot, however, just work towards achieving our mission. We must actively pray it into existence. We set goals on both a personal and organizational scale, but few of us have applied goal setting towards prayer.

An important role of the Intercessory Prayer Team is to establish and work towards achieving prayer goals. The goal setting process begins by establishing targets for intercession. We must ask ourselves: In order to achieve our mission, for whom or what should we be praying? We may begin with a group brainstorming session to surface potential focuses for prayer. The next step is to narrow down our focus to a manageable number of the more significant needs. As a rule, choose two to five targets. Targets may include: teens, parents of adolescents, the mission statement, the strategic plan, families, schools, community problems or issues, the youth ministry leaders, specific programs, etc.

The next step involves setting specific, quantitative, and measurable goals for each target. For instance, if one of our targeted needs is for the adult youth ministry team, we might state, “that each planning team member has two people who are committed to pray for them each day, beginning this January. Another example might be: “that each high school teen registered in the parish will be prayed for by name, each day, by one person starting this March.” Write each goal in sentence form. Include the target, the measurable goal, and the completion date.

When affixing measurable goals, we will want to be realistic with our present resources, yet challenged enough to stretch beyond our comfort zone. For instance, a congregation with little background or experience with

intercessory prayer should not embark on the ambitious goal of having a perpetual, twenty-four hour prayer vigil on behalf of every teen in the parish. On the other hand, we do not want to excuse ourselves from any challenge by simply writing a prayer to be recited during our worship service once a month.

## Practical Initiatives

Once the intercessory prayer goals are established, the final step is to develop concrete initiatives that ensure they are practically achieved. Lets take for example, the goal: “that each high school teen registered in the parish will be prayed for by name, each day, by one person, starting this March.”

One practical approach for addressing this goal might include the development of a prayer sponsorship ministry. This involves recruiting members of the congregation to serve as prayer sponsors for a teenager. Based on the congregation’s comfort level, the name of the teen, their grade, photo, etc. could be attached to a refrigerator magnet, or business card (to be placed on a mirror) and distributed to each sponsor. The sponsor would agree to pray for his or her teen each day. In order to help guide the prayers of the sponsor, a monthly prayer calendar that suggests how to specifically pray for their teen can be developed and distributed each month. (See the example on the next page.) Moreover, at the end of each year, the Intercessory Prayer Team can host a gathering that brings both sponsors and their prayer subjects (and parents) together for a social. Apart from prayer, a gathering like this would promote a deeper experience of intergenerational community.

This sponsorship initiative can be adapted to a partnership, where each person involved is actually praying for each other, promoting a more reciprocal approach to prayer. Additionally, a partnership expression can help advance greater intergenerational interaction among church members.

## General Prayer Calendar

The intercessory prayer team can publish a general calendar with daily prayer intentions of the youth ministry. A day's intention might include a gathering scheduled for the evening, or a youth ministry goal, or a name of a teen who is celebrating their birthday, or youth ministry requests—like the need for additional adult leaders, etc. A calendar can be distributed each month to subscribers through either email or regular mail.

## Parallel Prayer

While a meeting, activity, or event is in progress, a parallel prayer effort can be held. For instance, during the same time of an evangelistic youth outreach, a group of parents can meet to intercede for all the teens, speakers, and events of the gathering. Parallel prayer can be done individually (a group of people praying at the same time, but in different locations) or in a corporate manner (a gathered group in a location). Many retreat movements incorporate parallel prayer by establishing a chapel dedicated to intercession.

## Intentions for Worship Services

Not all elements of an intercessory prayer ministry need be newly created. Plugging into existing structures can multiply our efforts with little energy and time expended. Prayers during Sunday worship services or during the Prayers of the Faithful can be one such opportunity. Simply include an intention for the youth ministry each week or month. We can highlight an event, goal, people, or general intention. Parishioners will become better acquainted with what we are doing and more deeply invested in the youth ministry by consistently praying for it.

## Personal Intercessors

A personal intercessor is an individual whose consistently prays for a particular person in leadership. A full-time youth minister, for example, might have a person or persons praying for him or her each day. The ministry of a personal intercessor goes well beyond the

commitment of a prayer sponsor. Their role includes remaining in close contact with the person for whom he or she is praying in order to intercede for their particular issues and challenges. It's almost a given that a personal intercessor has the gift of intercession.

## Prayer Breakfast

On a regular basis the intercessory prayer team can sponsor a prayer breakfast. The purpose of the event would be to gather concerned people to share breakfast while praying for the needs of the youth ministry. The morning meeting might include a time of worship, a simple breakfast, reports of answered prayer, current prayer needs, and a period of intercession.

## Prayer Newsletter

Some churches might use a prayer newsletter to help support, inform, and encourage those participating in the efforts of intercessory prayer. A newsletter can be published regularly and be one page or as long as four. The content can include articles on how to pray, stories of answered prayer, publicity for different prayer groups, prayer needs, etc.

## Conclusion

We live in a pragmatic society. As a result, the ministry of intercession is easily and often overlooked. The truth is, prayerful intercession is one of the most powerful resources that God has given the church. Intercession is a spiritually rich fertilizer that increases the harvest of everything we do. When we make it a ministerial priority, we change the history of our congregations.

## Works Cited

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