

“Nurturing the Faith of the New Generations of Families”

John Roberto, LifelongFaith Associates (jroberto@lifelongfaith.com)

www.LifelongFaith.com www.FaithFormation2020.net www.CuratingFaithFormation.net
www.FaithFormationLearningExchange.net

Description

How can churches nurture the faith of the newest generations of families? How can we use the latest approaches, resources, and technologies to reach and engage parents and the whole family – at home and at church. We know from research and experience that *the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of children, adolescents, and emerging adults is their parents*. The best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith and involvement in faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith. This workshop will explore models and strategies to enrich the faith life of parents and the spiritual life of the whole family. Learn about a variety of ways to equip parents and families to growth in faith at home through learning and faith sharing, caring conversations, prayer and spiritual enrichment, service and mission, milestones, and rituals.

Part 1. What Can We Learn From Research

1. Factors that Promote Faith Growth in the 1st Third of Life (*Souls in Transition*. Christian Smith)

The task of religious socialization and faith formation falls almost entirely to two communities today. First are family households where parents do the primary socializing. Family religious socialization has always been the foundation for the development of faith and faith practices, and for participation in church life and worship. Second are religious congregations where the whole community, but especially faithful adults, can exert socializing influences on children and youth. These are the two critical contexts for the faith formation of children and youth in America today. Christian Smith observes, “If formation in faith does not happen there, it will – with rare exceptions – not happen anywhere (Christian Smith, 286).

Reflecting on the long term impact of family socialization on emerging adults (eighteen to twenty-three), researcher Christian Smith, in his book *Souls in Transition*, emphasizes the importance and impact of family socialization.

Teenagers with seriously religious parents are more likely than those without such parents to have been trained in their lives to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that that training “sticks” with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood. Emerging adults who grew up with seriously religious parents are through socialization more likely (1) to have internalized their parents religious worldview, (2) to possess the practical religious know-how needed to live more highly religious lives, and (3) to embody the identity orientations and behavioral tendencies toward continuing to practice what they have been taught religiously. At the heart of this social causal mechanism stands the elementary process of teaching – both formal and informal, verbal and nonverbal, oral and behavioral, intentional and unconscious, through both instruction and role modeling. We believe that one of the main ways by which empirically observed strong parental religion produced strong emerging adult religion in offspring is through the teaching involved in socialization. (Smith, 232)

A teenager who among his or her peers scored in the top one-quarter of a scale measuring these four factors – (1) *parental religion*, (2) *prayer*, (3) *importance of faith*, and (4) *scripture reading* – stands an 85% chance of landing in the Highest category of religion as an emerging adult; but one who scores in the Lowest one-quarter on that

scale stands only a miniscule chance (0.4 percent) of landing at the high end of religion when he or she is 18-23 years old. In short, the combination of a teenager's parent religion, importance of faith, prayer, and scripture reading makes an enormous substantive difference in religious outcomes during emerging adulthood. A teenager who scores in the top quarter of a scale measuring three more factors – (5) *having supportive nonparent adults in one's religious congregation*, (6) *having religious experiences*, and (7) *not doubting religious faith* – stands 75 times the chance of landing in the Highest category of religion compared to one who scores in the bottom quarter. These three variables taken alone thus also make a big difference in the probability that a teenager will end up being highly religious as he or she grows into emerging adulthood.

In brief, with these seven factors alone, we have identified some powerful teenage factors associated with and, we think, causing differences in emerging adult religious commitment and practice.

2. The Impact of Congregational Culture on Faith Growth (*The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*. Martinson, Black, and Roberto)

The "Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry" presents a portrait of the strong impact faith communities can have on the faith and lives of young people when churches set their minds to fully enfranchise young people in their life and ministry. When pastors, congregational leaders, parents and adult youth leaders work together to promote real commitment to young people as full members of the body of Christ and carry that commitment across the life and mission of the entire congregation, teenagers mature in faith and grow to respect and love their church. The EYM Study demonstrates how age-level youth ministry and ministries with family are dependent upon and greatly enhanced by congregations setting young people and youth ministry as one of its essential priorities. If a congregation is not willing to make this commitment, youth and youth ministry will always be tangential and second rate. Congregational commitment to young people is essential for an effective ministry with youth.

While confirming the power of several well known youth ministry practices, the EYM Study pointed to a congregational "culture of the Spirit" – something more basic and central in establishing vital faith in youth. The research points to the value of a congregation's culture endowed with a palpable sense of the living, active presence of God at work among 1) the people of the whole congregation, 2) its ministries with youth, 3) its parents, 4) the ministries of the larger congregation, and 5) its congregational leaders (pastor, youth minister, adult and youth leaders) as providing the most powerful, pervasive influence these congregations have on young people long-term. It is the communal awareness of participation in God's presence and action that permeates the values, relationships, and activities of these congregations, giving rise to an atmosphere, a "culture of the Spirit," focused on mission and the transformation of life that seems to make them so influential in the lives and faith of young people.

At the heart of this "culture of the Spirit" is the belief that God is present, active, and alive in everything they do. These are congregations that live their belief that Jesus Christ is present and graciously at work in and through the body of Christ for the sake of the salvation of the world. Their commitment: We, his disciples, his Church are called to pass on faith and call young people to discipleship, witness and service. From these shared beliefs and commitments flow the practices of ministry with youth.

The congregational "culture of the Spirit" generates four spheres of relationships and practices that intersect and powerfully impact the lives of young people in the EYM congregations.

- First, these congregations' basic ministries are thoroughly **intergenerational**. Young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making.
- Second, these congregations have developed **age-level ministries** marked by trusted relationships and custom-designed ministry practices and activities within a caring atmosphere of high expectation. There are multiple nurturing relationships and activities intentionally planned to create an atmosphere of respect, growth and belonging that generates an "alternative youth subculture."

- Third, these congregations educate **parents** in the faith and equip them for family/household caring conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service.
- Fourth, these congregations are blessed with competent, faith-filled, **leadership** from the pastor to the youth minister to the adult and youth leaders who are committed to young people and developing their faith lives.

Aligning and integrating the intergenerational ministries of the congregation with adolescent age-level ministries and families/households of the young people, supported by competent, faith-filled leaders, generates intersecting arenas of influence that seem to make the work of these congregations so significant in the lives of their mature Christian youth.

Family/Household Faith Assets

Five Faith Assets describe the role of family/household faith, adding another influence to the youth-friendly culture of the whole congregation and the effective age-level ministry with youth. The family/household Faith Assets describe faith practices at home and the role of the congregation in equipping and support parental and family faith.

Asset 40. Possess Strong Parental Faith: Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith. A vital and informed parental faith includes understanding the Christian faith, participating in worship, praying, and engaging in service and mission. Young people are in households and relationships with parents where mature faith is cultivated and modeled.

Asset 41. Promotes Family Faith Practices: Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, Bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life. Parents not only know and live Christianity themselves, they draw their teenagers into faith practices. Parents pray with their adolescents at table, at family celebrations, during times of crises and over individual and family decisions. Service is a way of life. Together parents and young people “turn their faces outward” and live life for others.

Asset 42. Reflects Family Harmony: Family members’ expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith. Families and households find ways to navigate the challenges and stresses of daily life with approaches marked by respect, equal regard, open communication, and cooperation. Parents, grandparents and others practice individual accountability, forgiveness and reconciliation modeling faith in action and generating an atmosphere where faith can be referenced and discussed.

Asset 43. Equips Parents: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equip parents for nurturing faith at home. Congregations provide strong adult faith formation, emphasizing adult discipleship and offering strong preaching, Bible studies, small groups and many forms of adult Christian education. Programs develop parental faith and prepare parents for nurturing the faith of their children and adolescents.

Asset 44. Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships. Parent-youth programs focus on adolescent-specific issues such as family communication, adolescent independence, decision-making, choosing friends, sexual expression, and conflict resolution; as well as faith themes such as studying the Bible together, discussing case studies from youth culture, and exploring popular media. Parent-youth programs enhance the capacity of parents and teenagers to communicate and work together on matters of faith and life.

Faith Influence of Parents and Families

Echoing other major studies of adolescent faith formation conducted in the last two decades, the EYM study affirms the contribution that parents and other family members make to the faith maturity of youth. Young people reference their parents’ faith as models of the Christian life. Teenagers talk about their parents and friends of their parents reaching out to care for them. Young people know about their parents’ vital faith not

only from observing them at church, but also from conversations about faith and daily life at meals, in the car or on intergenerational, family mission trips – practices encouraged by the church’s ministry with families. These parents read the Bible and pray with their teenagers. They include their young people in faith-informed discussions of family decision and budgets. These discussions have been encouraged by parent-youth case study conversations during youth ministry activities.

| Influence of Family as Rated by Youth | | Parental/Family Faith Qualities | |
|--|------|--|------|
| Family Harmony | 7.19 | God Consciousness | 8.23 |
| (Lack of Family Disharmony) | | Moral Responsibility | 7.97 |
| Parents Are Affectionate | 6.83 | Family Disharmony | 7.03 |
| Lack of Parental Verbal Abuse | 6.41 | Family Orientation | 7.02 |
| Mother Helps with Problems | 6.29 | Use of Faith Support Group | 6.70 |
| Mother Influences My Faith | 6.15 | Centrality of Faith | 6.99 |
| Father Helps with Problems | 5.60 | Social Responsibility | 6.16 |
| Family Influences My Faith | 5.41 | Desire for Participating in Leadership, Community, and Spirituality | 6.49 |

One of the study’s scales, “Family Influences My Faith,” includes the question: “How often does your family (the people you live with) sit down together & talk about God, the Bible, or other religious things?” One in four young people said their family does this on a weekly or daily basis, and 40% once or twice a month. The percentages of how often the families sit down together to talk about God or matters of faith are significantly higher than those in previous studies. Young people in exemplary congregations explore understandings of God and matters of faith in their families. Faith instruction does not only occur in the congregation and youth ministry. Families reinforce what’s learned at church through intentional faith practices and conversations at home.

The family’s capacity to influence adolescent faith can also be seen in the spiritual guidance and modeling of fathers, mothers, and extended family members. Both mothers and fathers were identified as positive influences on young peoples’ faith, with fathers especially, scoring significantly higher than in previous studies.

Equipping Parents to Pass on Faith

| Characteristic | Adult Leaders | Pastor & Youth Minister |
|--|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Adult Workers’ Relationship with Parents | 6.93 | |
| Helps Parents with Parenting Issues | 5.23 | |
| Effectiveness of Parental Education | 3.97 | |
| Strengthening Parent-Youth Relationships | | 4.41 |
| Support of Families in Conflict Situations | | 4.16 |
| Equipping Parents | | 4.70 |

During the last twenty years youth ministry has reclaimed the role of family in faith formation. This renewed involvement of families in ministry with young people is evident in the values and practices of the congregations of the study. Congregations in the study have invited parents into partnership with the church in nurturing the faith of their sons and daughters. Parents exercise their partnership by participating in assessment and planning. They become the eyes and ears for the youth minister as they listen to what other parents are saying and experiencing. These parents provide realistic perspectives on what is going well in the congregation’s ministry with youth as well as identify challenges that need attention in their own families and the families of the community.

Ministry with families strengthens parenting skills especially around the developmental needs of teenagers. Parent sessions address topics of interest to parents of youth by serving as a safe place where concerned parents can work with their issues and questions. Youth ministers meet with groups of parents to evaluate past events and get their input on ministry direction and upcoming events. Congregations in the study create networks of ministry in which parents, youth, and extended families are instructed and healed. These

networks of support for families provide a framework in which parents deepen their faith, grow in their ability to raise teenagers and expand their capacities to nurture faith in their young people.

Youth ministers in the study noted the contribution their ministries make to strengthening families and parents. One scale, "Strengthening Parent-Youth Relationships," reflects scores significantly higher than those in a recent national study of full time youth ministers. Ministers were asked, "How well is each of these aspects of your congregation's youth ministry being achieved or realized?" Their responses included:

- Helping parents become more involved in the lives of their youth
- Providing opportunities for teens & parents to interact
- Helping parents recognize and adopt wise methods of discipline
- Strengthening family relationships
- Providing help for teaching Christian concepts of right and wrong

The significantly higher scores on these items might well be related to the close family relationships that exist in most of the congregations studied. These high scores could also be a reason these families have more positive influence on the faith of their teenagers than parents in previous studies.

Strengthening a family's capacity to nurture life and pass on faith to their young people is evident in the study. One scale, "Equipping Parents," contained the key elements on which congregations in the study scored higher than those in historical studies:

- Providing education and resources parents needed to teach their youth Christian concepts of right and wrong
- Encouraging parent-youth communication through classes on how to discuss adolescent issues with youth
- Helping parents share their faith with their youth at home by such things as rituals, faith conversations, etc.
- Encouraging families to teach service as a way of life through their involvement in helping activities
- Showing parents how to foster the development of moral values in their children
- Establishing a network of care and support for youth and their families

Cross referencing these scales with others reflecting the faith commitments of youth, indicate that close parent-youth bonds, help and support given to families in conflict, and efforts made toward equipping parents of teenagers for navigating adolescence are positively related to vital faith in young people.

Parental Involvement in Youth Ministry

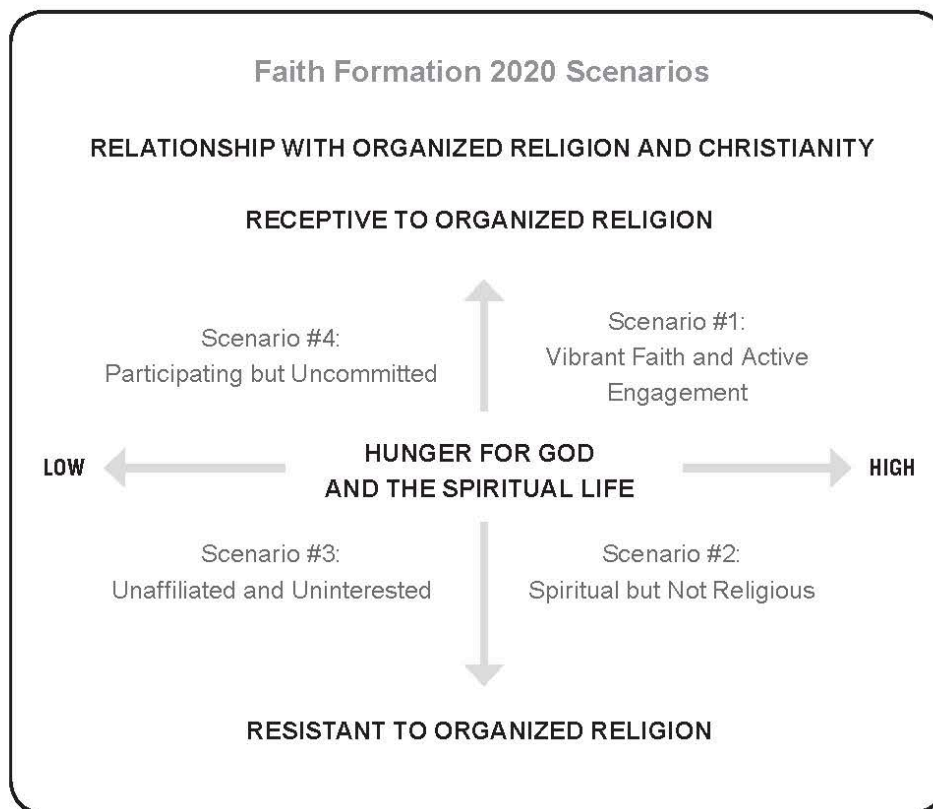
The results of the study clearly indicate that parents are supportive of their congregation's effective youth ministries. One of the reasons for this support: they view the congregation's ministry to be a positive force in the lives of their sons and daughters. One church reported that families join the parish because the youth ministry provides a hospitable, substantive environment that is a safe place for their teenagers. These parents appreciate the knowledge of the faith, the values and the leadership skills they see developed in the youth of the congregation and encourage their sons and daughters to participate.

The partnerships between the congregation and the families of their youth create a working synergy that enables the congregation, its youth ministry, and the families to contribute more to the lives and faith of their young people. In many congregations parents were directly involved in the congregation's youth ministry relationships and activities, serving as leaders/facilitators for Bible study groups, mission trips, retreats, worship, and small groups. Congregations also involve parents in planning processes to shape the direction of youth ministry. Given parents profound influence in the lives of their teens, their involvement in youth ministry is a potential source of growth in faith and life for both teenagers and their parents.

Quality relationships at church had a positive impact on the young people's families. Two scales of the survey indicate that building strong relationships at church improved the atmosphere in families. The study revealed

that family relationships are strengthened when families were equipped at church: 1) to engage in service activities with their teenage sons and daughters, and 2) when they were equipped for teaching Christian concepts of right and wrong to their adolescents. Parents indicated that they often struggle with the challenges of discussing their values with their children, and are left feeling alone and isolated because of the cultural forces impacting their sons and daughters. Thus they deeply valued the support these congregations provided in assisting in passing their values on to their children.

Part 2. Interpreting the Religious and Spiritual Needs of Parents & Families



Scenario #1. Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first scenario describes a world in which people of all ages and generations are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. People have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for all ages and generations to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, at home and at church, that develops vibrant faith, is continuous throughout life, and engages all people in the life and mission of the church community.

In most congregations the overwhelming majority of resources, energy, and leadership are directed toward faith formation with people in Scenario #1, oftentimes with a decreasing number of people for a shorter period of the lifespan (e.g., grade school through high school years). The future of faith formation in Scenario #1 is being significantly impacted by a number of driving forces including: 1) the growing number of people who are leaving established Christian churches – people who claim no religious affiliation (about 15% of the population) and those who consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (almost 20% of 18-39 year-olds); 2) declining participation in Christian worship, sacraments and rituals (baptism and marriage), and church life, in general, among those who consider themselves Christian; and 3) a serious decline in family religious socialization at home as few parents make passing on a faith tradition and faith practices central to family life.

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #1

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Develop continuous faith formation for all ages and generations, especially for adults (twenties-nineties), that engages people – mind, body, heart, and spirit – in a diversity of ways to grow in faith for a lifetime.
- Strengthen family socialization by equipping parents and families to become centers of faith formation and practice.
- Become a “sticky” church – keeping all ages involved in faith formation through a diversity of programs, activities, and resources at home and church that address their life situations and religious and spiritual needs.
- Embrace the tremendous potential of digital media and web technologies to provide faith formation and engage people in lifelong faith growth 24x7x365.
- Empower people of vibrant faith with the knowledge, faith sharing skills, and confidence to share their faith with those who are not involved in a church community or spiritually committed.

Scenario #2. Spiritual, but Not Religious

The second scenario describes a world in which people are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but most likely are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service, or in online spiritual resources and communities. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among the eighteen- to thirty-nine-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to engage people where they live (physical and virtual communities), build relationships, engage in spiritual conversations, and offer programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth.

Scenario #3. Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The third scenario describes a world in which people experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated and Uninterested reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among the eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to find ways to “plant” themselves in the midst of the cultures and worlds of the Unaffiliated and Uninterested, build relationships, and be witnesses to the Christian faith in the world today.

If the statistics are accurate, the growing numbers of people reflected in Scenarios #2 and #3, especially people in their 20s and 30s, present the greatest challenge to congregations and to their faith formation efforts, now and into the future. The challenge presented by these two scenarios is expanding the congregation’s vision of faith formation to embrace the life worlds – and spiritual needs – of people in Scenario #2 and #3 who see little need for church, and the need for God and the spiritual life. Congregations need to develop strategies and approaches for moving faith formation from the church campus into the world.

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #2

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Invest time and resources to develop specialized faith formation around the life situations and spiritual needs of the “Spiritual, but Not Religious” who are in their twenties and thirties.
- Provide faith formation programming for spiritual seekers that is conducted in “Third Place” settings outside of the church facilities (e.g., Lifetree Café).
- Develop faith formation around marriage and baptism to respond to the potential for (re)engagement in church life of the “Spiritual, but Not Religious?”
- Provide a guided process and program for spiritually hungry people to investigate the Christian faith and join in small communities with other seekers for spiritual growth and support (e.g., the Alpha course).

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #3

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Establish a “Third Place” gathering site as a platform for reaching the “Unaffiliated and Uninterested” through a variety of spiritual and/or life-centered programs, conversations, and activities?
- Develop a “web-presence” that is inviting and attractive to the “Unaffiliated and Uninterested” so that they can investigate and experience the Christian faith online.
- Sponsor programs, such as service projects and mission trips, that are designed so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.

Scenario #4. Participating, but Uncommitted

The fourth scenario describes a world in which people attend church activities, but are not actively engaged in their church community or spiritually committed. They may participate in significant seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, and celebrate sacraments and milestone events, such as marriage and baptism. Some may even attend worship regularly, and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual.

Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that recognizes that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (spiritual commitment) and a more vibrant faith, and develop approaches for increasing people’s engagement with the church community and the Christian tradition.

Scenario #4 reflects a growing number of people who, while receptive to an established church, do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment. Congregations often address the spiritual and religious needs of people in Scenario #4 through the lens of Scenario #1, which doesn’t usually work effectively. Congregations need to begin in the life worlds of Scenario 4 and craft faith formation around their spiritual and religious needs, and their relationship with the faith community.

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #4

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Begin faith formation with the birth and baptism of children in order to strengthen family socialization by equipping parents and families to become centers of faith formation and practice.
- Develop pathways for spiritual commitment and more active engagement by offering a formation process that helps people develop and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ, explore the foundational teachings of the Christian faith, and live the fundamental Christian practices.
- Utilize digital media and web technologies to extend faith formation – resources, social networking, faith practices – into the daily lives of people who only participate occasionally?
- Focus on the occasions of participation, such as sacraments and milestones, to provide faith formation that involves the whole family, and invites them into more active engagement in the church community.

Part 3. Strategies for Family Faith Formation

1. The Home as a Center of Faith Formation Family Faith Practices.

Effective religious socialization comes about through embedded practices. Churches can develop the *home as a center of faith formation* by promoting foundational family faith practices: caring conversations, rituals and traditions, prayer, Bible reading, and service. Research consistently shows that effective religious socialization comes about through embedded family religious practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community. The daily household routine is marked by rituals of prayer, by conversations about God, and by

sacred objects. Holidays provided special occasions for experiencing the warmth of family, friends, and fellow congregants.

Churches can equip parents, and the whole family, with the skills and resources to incorporate faith practices into family life: caring conversations, eating together – especially the power of Sunday meals and holidays, praying together – especially at meals, reading the Bible, engaging in devotions, celebrating rituals and traditions, service, providing moral instruction, and worshipping together with the church community. Guide families in recognizing the presence of God in their daily life of family practices and activities.

Example: *Four Keys for Practicing Faith* (Vibrant Faith Ministries, www.vibrantfaith.org)

1. **Caring Conversation.** Christian values and faith are passed on to the next generation through supportive conversation. Listening and responding to the daily concerns of children and youth makes it easier to have meaningful conversations regarding the love of God, and are ways to express God's love to others. Hearing their parents "faith stories" is one of the most important influences on the faith of children and teenagers.
2. **Family Devotions and Prayer.** The Christian faith shapes the whole of our lives and involves a lifetime of study, reflection, and prayer. Family devotions provide a way to learn more about the Bible and Christian tradition as a family, and apply the teachings to daily life as a follower of Jesus Christ. This understanding of a devotional life includes, but is not limited to, public worship, bedtime prayers, Bible reading and study, table grace, evening and morning prayers, and praying alone at any time of the day or night.
3. **Family Rituals and Traditions.** Families identify themselves and tell their family stories through daily routines, celebrations, and rituals. Family rituals can take many forms from daily rituals such as mealtime, bedtime, leaving and returning; celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries, and special achievements; church year rituals at home such as Advent and Lent; milestones such as births and deaths, first day of school and graduations, and so on. Family rituals and traditions speak volumes about what the family values, believes and promotes, and how much the family values its faith.
4. **Family Service.** Engaging in service with one's family is a powerful opportunity for growing in faith. Both youth and adults are more likely to have a growing, strong faith when their family serves others together: in the home, in the congregation, in the community and world. (Anderson and Hill)

Example: *FAITH 5 – Faith Acts in the Home* (Faith Inkubators, www.faithink.com)

The FAITH 5 connects church to home, faith to life, and parents to kids in a powerful way. The five steps of the FAITH 5 are:

- *Step One: Share highs and lows.* Name something good and bad you experienced today.
- *Step Two: Read a verse from your Bible.* Bible verses that families explore every night.
- *Step Three: Talk about how the verse relates to highs and lows.* Unpack the verse a bit. What does it mean in your own words? How might it relate to where you are today in your highs and lows?
- *Step Four: Pray for one another's highs and lows, for your family, and for the world.* Simply talk to God, thank Jesus for the good, and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in specific problems.
- *Step Five: Bless one another.* Trace the sign of the cross on one another's forehead or palm as a reminder that you belong to God and to one another.

2. Faith Formation with Young Children

Churches can begin family faith formation with new parents during pregnancy by nurturing the faith growth of the parents, preparing them for the vocation of parenting, understanding their new child, celebrating the baptism milestone, providing resources for nurturing family faith (continuing through the next several years), welcoming and engaging them in the Christian community as a new family. Begin parent education and formation before the birth of the child and continue throughout life, providing the setting for teaching, modeling, and demonstrating family faith practices that can be incorporated into home life. Establish "pregnancy and early childhood advice centers" to support parents through the pregnancy and early years of

childhood. Provide parent mentors, such as parents whose children are now young adults, to provide one-on-one mentoring and support. Connect new parents by providing small groups for encouragement, support, and learning. Utilize the church website and other websites and online resources for resourcing and social networking among parents. Parent education and faith formation will need to address the religious and spiritual needs and backgrounds of the millennial generation of parents who are in their twenties and thirties.

3. Parent Formation

Churches can target milestones and critical transitions during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, to provide opportunities for parent faith formation and parent education, in-person and online. Provide stand-alone parent faith formation and education programs and incorporate parent programs and activities into existing faith formation programs and support groups for parents, such as a mom's group. Develop a progression of parent workshops through the life cycle: (1) preparing for parenting, (2) parenting young children, (3) parenting children, (4) parenting teenagers, (5) parent emerging adults (eighteen to thirty), and (6) parenting alone.

4. Milestone Faith Formation.

Churches can develop family faith formation around the naturally-occurring religious and lifecycle milestones in family life, such as baptism, start of school, school graduations, and so on. Between milestones celebration, provide developmentally-appropriate resources – in print, audio, video, and online formats – to continue faith growth at home.

5. Family Learning Programs

Churches can engage families in structured learning programs for the whole family – providing opportunities to learn and grow in faith together and develop skills for sharing faith, praying, celebrating traditions, serving others, and practicing the Christian faith in daily life. Churches can utilize a variety of family learning formats such as: monthly family or intergenerational learning programs, family workshops through the year, family cluster or small group learning programs (at the church or in homes), family-centered Bible study or lectionary-based Scripture reflection, family-centered vacation Bible school, family retreats and camps, and family-centered sacramental preparation programs.

6. Family Service

Churches can offer a variety of developmentally-appropriate family service projects where families can choose from different levels of commitment from beginner experiences to advanced projects that are local, regional, national, and international, such as: (1) local mission projects lasting anywhere from a few hours to one day in length, (2) short-term mission trips lasting anywhere from two to five days and requiring an overnight stay on location, and (3) weeklong mission trips within the United States as well internationally, designed for families who are ready for a more intensive experience. Include a learning component for each mission/service project that focuses on understanding the issue being addressed, exploring the teachings of Scripture and tradition, developing the skills for mission and service, and then, upon completion of the project, reflecting upon the involvement. (See the Transforming the World: Engagement in and Formation for Mission and Service for more information.)

7. In-home Resources

Churches can provide families with a variety of resources – print, audio, video, and online – to help families embed faith practices in family life at each stage of life, including resources for parents at each stage of life, for in-home celebration of church year feasts and seasons, for extending Sunday worship into the home, for celebrating milestones, for engaging in service, and so many more. Use the church website and online resources to deliver timely faith formation resources to the home, and provide social networking among families to support each other and share faith stories and practices.

8. Increase Active Engagement in Church Life

Churches can connect faith formation programming to family participation in church life by designing faith formation programming to prepare families for participation in the life, ministry, and activities of the church according to their abilities. Develop learning programs and resources that provide families with the language, practices, rituals, habits that enable them to participate meaningfully in the life of the community: in worship, prayer, service, leadership, sacraments, church year feasts and seasons, and other activities and events of church life. The key is that what people are learning in their programs is aligned with hands-on participation in congregational life. For example, many churches utilize a lectionary-based model of faith formation in which the content of the learning program is the Sunday Scripture readings. Here the connection is direct: what is learned in an educational program is experienced at Sunday worship. Connecting learning programs and congregational life takes many forms: liturgical seasons, Sunday lectionary readings, preparation for a congregation-wide service projects, and so on. The formation of a distinctive Christian identity is shaped by participation in the mission and practices of the faith community. Through their participation, people of all ages come to be recognized and accepted as full members of the congregation. People are not only shaped by the practices in which they participate. They also 'act back' on the community of practice, with new insights, ideas, and actions that can contribute to the transformation of those practices, and therefore, of the community.

9. Expectations for Family Faith Growth

Churches can engage families more consciously, actively, and experientially in learning, growing in faith, and participating in church life through an annual, multi-dimensional faith growth plan. The annual plan can be a blend of whole family activities and individual parent-child activities. Families can be organized into groups, each with a leader who meets with the family group regularly to facilitate learning and reflection. Churches set expectations for learning and participation. Families create their annual plan around a menu of offerings designed to help them fulfill the church's expectations, for example: (1) participating in Sunday worship (regularly, but at least twice monthly); (2) participating in important church year feasts and celebrations, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week; (3) participating in monthly family learning programs on religious themes; (4) participating in at least six mission/service projects during the year, (5) participating in an annual spiritual formation retreat experience, and (6) engaging in family home practices, such as reading the Bible, celebrating rituals and traditions, and praying.

10. Christian Practices Immersion Experiences

Churches can offer families Christian practice immersion experiences that give them a firsthand experience of a Christian practice, such as hospitality, reading the Bible, and keeping Sabbath, and then guide them in living the practice in their daily lives. Each immersion experience begins with a direct experience of the practice – in a learning program, in the church, or in the community/world, followed by reflection on the experience, education about the practice, and resources for living the practice in daily life. Offer a variety of immersion experiences throughout the year in various program formats and timeframes.

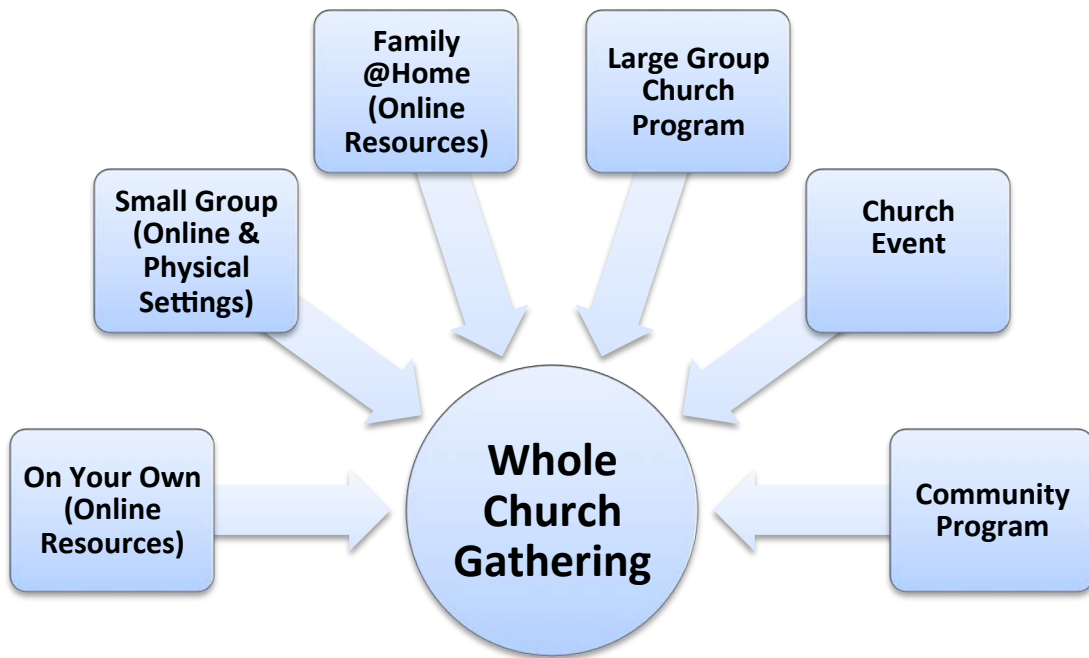
Part 4. Creating a Network of Family Faith Formation

- **Faith Formation on Your Own:** through reading, online courses, audio and video programs, movies, television programs
- **Faith Formation at Home:** through Bible reading, storytelling and caring conversation, prayer and devotions, rituals and traditions, service
- **Faith Formation in Small Groups:** through Bible and theology study groups, social issues study groups, faith sharing groups, lectionary-based groups, service/mission action groups, support groups
- **Faith Formation in Large Groups;** through courses, speaker series, workshops, film festivals, retreats, conferences, intergenerational programs
- **Faith Formation in the Congregation:** through Sunday worship, church year events and celebrations, service/mission activities, ministry and leadership in the church and community

- **Faith Formation in the Community and World:** through programs, courses, clinics, workshops, and presentations at universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, regional church programs; through engagement in community/ political action, local and global service and justice projects

Websites, social media, and digital technologies (an iPod Touch, smart cell phones, iPad) mean that churches can deliver faith formation experiences and resources anytime and anywhere, reaching people wherever they go online (home, work, school, vacation, coffee house). The interplay between learning in physical places and virtual online spaces can revolutionize faith formation in a church.

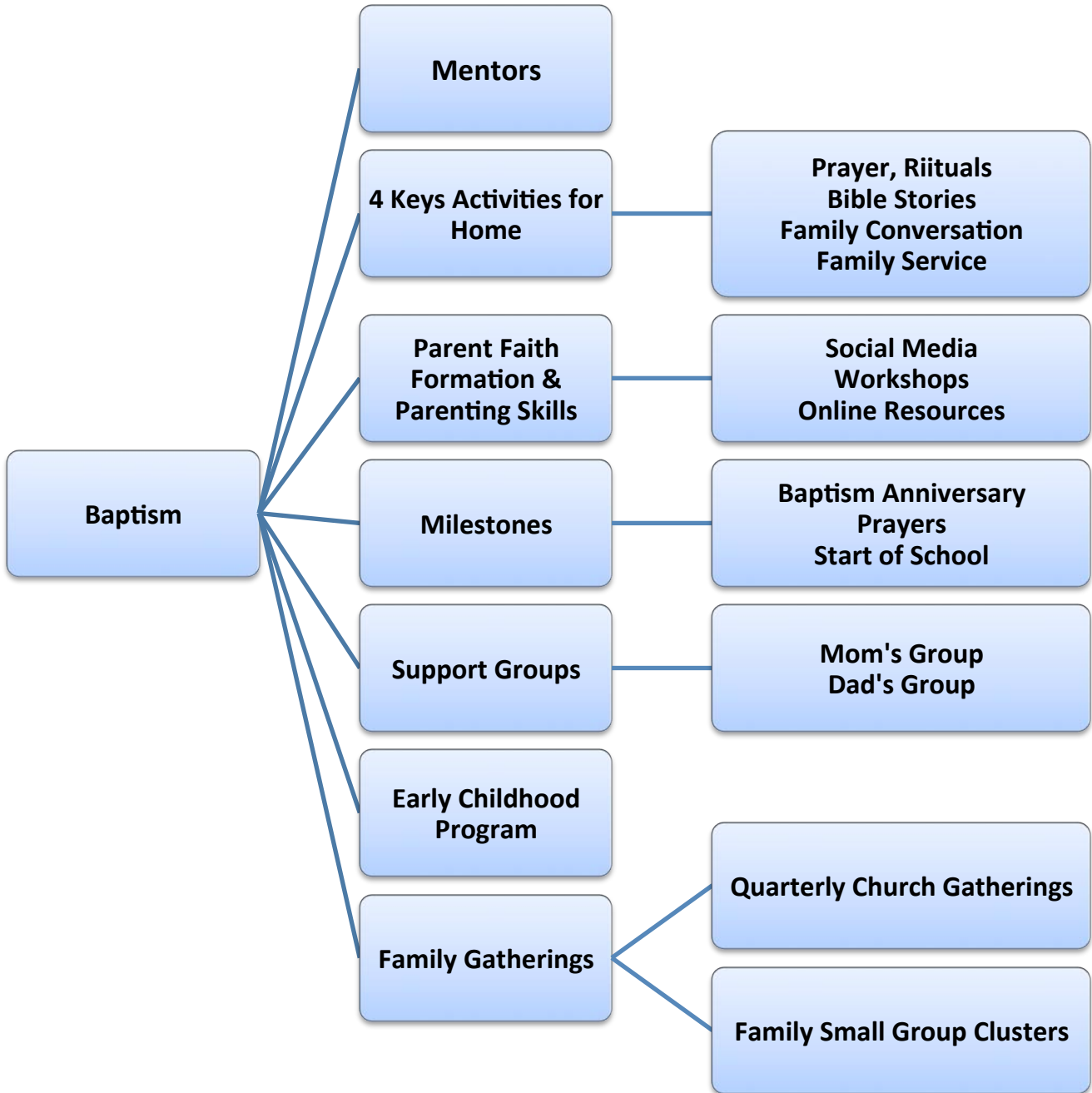
Approach #1. From Individualized Faith Formation to Whole Church Gathering



Approach #2. From Gathered Event into Everyday Life



Approach #3. Targeted Group



A Network Approach to Faith Formation

