

Center for Congregations

Passing Along Faith Project

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Every congregation wants vibrant, life-transforming faith formation for all ages and generations that promotes lifelong faith growth and discipleship. Our 21st century world presents congregations and their leaders with significant challenges, but also new possibilities for creating dynamic faith formation. Congregations need leaders who possess the knowledge, skills, and practices to develop faith forming communities in the 21st century.

The *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century* program is developed around the knowledge, practices, approaches, and skills for 21st century faith formation. It is designed to guide leaders in embracing a new vision for faith formation and implementing a comprehensive approach that will:

- * engage all generations intergenerationally
- * nurture family faith and equip parents to transmit faith to their children
- * address the unique needs of people across the life cycle: children, youth, and adults
- * develop missional outreach to the unaffiliated and uninvolved and invite people into discipleship and participation in the faith community
- * utilize digitally-enabled and digitally connected approaches in faith formation

Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century is a four part educational program for pastors, faith formation leaders, youth ministers, and leaders in all Christian congregations. The program engages participants in:

1. exploring the emerging vision and principles of 21st century learning and faith formation
2. designing a lifelong plan for faith formation with new models and strategies for faith formation with age groups, families, and the whole church
3. designing an online platform for faith formation programming
4. learning how to use the new digital methods and resources in faith formation
5. developing the skills for curating religious content and experiences
6. introducing faith formation innovations into the life of a congregation

Resources

** *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*. John Roberto. (LifelongFaith, 2015)

The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World. Keith Anderson (Church Publishing, 2015).

Families at the Center of Faith Formation. Leif Kehrwald, Gene Roehlkepartain, Jolene Roehlkepartain, and John Roberto (LifelongFaith, 2016)

Generations Together. Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto (LifelongFaith, 2014)

Intergenerational Christian Formation. Holly Allen & Christine Ross (IVP Books, 2012).

Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. John Roberto, editor. (LifelongFaith, 2015)

Program Plan

Program 1: *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century* (November 15, 2017)

Homework: *Researching the Needs of the Faith Community: People & Programming*

Program #1 introduces the five elements of the new faith forming ecology which forms the foundation for developing a vibrant congregational culture in the 21st century. The new faith forming ecology is designed to: 1) engage all generations—intergenerationally; 2) nurture family faith and equips parents to transmit faith at home; 3) address the unique needs of age groups—children, youth, and adults; 4) develop missional outreach to the unaffiliated and uninvolved and invite people into discipleship and participation in the faith community; and 5) utilize online communities and resources, and digitally-enabled strategies for faith formation. Participants will apply the five elements by exploring their congregational culture and faith formation programs and activities.

Program 2: *Envisioning Lifelong Faith Formation in Faith Communities* (February 7, 2017)

Homework: *Designing a Plan for Lifelong Faith Formation*

1. Presentation: Envisioning Lifelong Faith Formation
2. Presentation and Application: Innovative Approaches & Program Models for Lifelong Faith Formation
 - Designing Intergenerational Faith Formation
 - Designing Family Faith Formation
 - Designing Life Cycle Faith Formation from Childhood through Adulthood
3. Presentation and Application: Digitally Enabled and Digitally Connected Faith Formation
4. Envisioning: What Might Lifelong Faith Formation Look Like in our Parish Community?

Program 3: *Designing New Projects in Lifelong Faith Formation* (April 18, 2018)

Homework: *Design Work*

Program 4 (Webinar): *Launching a Faith Formation Plan* (June or September 2018)

Program 5: (Webinar): *Reviewing Progress* (January 2019)

Program 6. (Gathering): *Sharing Reports on Models and Impact* (May or June 2019)

Workshop #1.

Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century

Part 1. Maturing in Faith

Holistic Faith Formation

“Christian faith formation is a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ. Lifelong Christian faith formation is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by scripture, tradition and reason.” (*The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation*)

A robust, vital, and life-giving Christian faith is holistic: a way of the head, the heart, and the hands—informing, forming, and transforming people in Christian faith and identity.

- *A way of the head* (inform) demands a discipleship of faith seeking understanding and belief with personal conviction, sustained by study, reflecting, discerning and deciding, all toward spiritual wisdom for life. This requires that we educate people to know, understand, and embrace with personal conviction Christianity’s core belief and values.
- *A way of the heart* (form) demands a discipleship of right relationships and right desires, community building, hospitality and inclusion, trust in God’s love, and prayer and worship. This requires that we foster growth in people’s identity through formation and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community.
- *A way of the hands* (transform) demands a discipleship of love, justice, peace-making, simplicity, integrity, healing, and repentance. This requires that we foster in people an openness to a lifelong journey of conversion toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and for the life of the world. (See *Will There Be Faith: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*. Thomas Groome, HarperOne, 2011, pages 111-119).

Congregations want Christian formation that *informs*, *forms*, and *transforms*; that immerses people into the practices and way of life of a tradition-bearing community where they can be transformed spiritually; and that engages all ages and generations in a lifelong process of growing, experiencing, celebrating, and living the Christian faith throughout life. While they may express this differently, Christian churches seek to help people...

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

Characteristics of Faith Maturing

- *What does a maturing Christian look like?*
 - *What are appropriate expectations for faith formation in each decade of life?*
 - *What do we hope to accomplish in the lives of people at each stage of life .*
1. Sustaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing and Bible reading.
 2. Making the Christian faith a way of life by integrating their beliefs into the conversation, decisions, and actions of daily life.
 3. Possessing a vital faith and being aware of God present and active in their own life, the lives of others, and the life of the world.
 4. Seeking spiritual growth by actively pursuing questions of faith, learning what it means to believe in God, and what it's like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
 5. Living a life of service by caring for others, reaching out those in need, and addressing injustice in the world.
 6. Sharing the Good News through words and actions, through Christian stewardship and working for peace, justice and human dignity.
 7. Participating fully, consciously, actively and regularly in the ritual and worship life of the faith community.
 8. Articulating the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith and demonstrating a commitment to learning and growing in this faith.
 9. Exercising moral responsibility by applying Christian ethics, virtues, principles, values, and social teaching to moral decision-making, life situations, and in interactions with the larger culture.
 10. Practicing faith in Jesus Christ, privately and publicly, through participation in the congregation's worship, ministries, and leadership.
 11. Discerning and using their gifts to actively belong to and participate in the life and mission of the Christian community.
 12. Exploring God's call to vocation through prayer, reflection, and discernment.
 13. Possessing a positive spirit with loving and hopeful attitudes toward others and life, convinced that they can make the world a better place.

Background: Eight Marks of Mature Faith (Search Institute)

1. Mark of Faith #1: Trusting and Believing
2. Mark of Faith #2: Seeking Spiritual Growth
3. Mark of Faith #3: Integrating Faith and Life
4. Mark of Faith #4: Holding Life-Affirming Values
5. Mark of Faith #5: Experiencing the Fruits of Faith
6. Mark of Faith #6: Nurturing Faith in Community
7. Mark of Faith #7: Advocating Social Change
8. Mark of Faith #8: Acting and Serving

Three Spiritual-Religious Identities

Vibrant Faith and Engaged in the Congregation

A religious faith is central to the lives of the engaged. These are parents who are transmitting this faith to their children and are actively engaged as a family in a church community. They are children, adolescents, and parents who are spiritually committed and growing in their faith. They have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. They are practicing their faith at home as a family.

Moderate Faith Practice and Occasionally Engaged in the Congregation

Children, adolescents, and parents/families participate occasionally in church life—in seasonal celebrations, major events, and age-group programs. For parents transmitting a religious faith primarily means bringing their children to educational programs at church. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, they 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.

Uninvolved and Unaffiliated

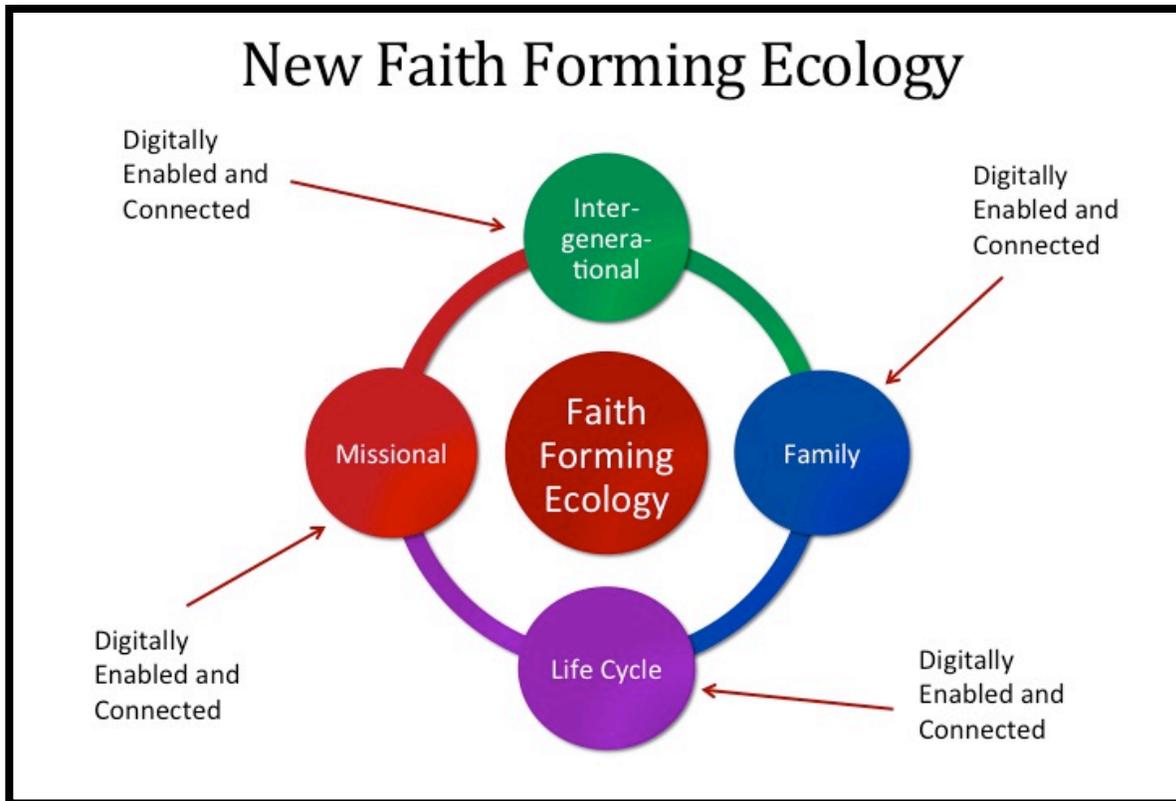
For the uninvolved and unaffiliated religion is not personally important in their lives—and their family's life. They do not belong to a religious congregation. They may be spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs or focused on their family, providing engaging experiences for children and youth and/or the whole family. Many parents are “first generation Nones” and are raising their children in religious uninvolved and unaffiliated homes creating a “second generation of Nones.” Many parents (Millennials and Gen X) left organized religion because they stopped believing in the religion's teachings (top reason) or their family was never that religious when they were growing up or their experience of negative religious teaching about or treatment of gay and lesbian people (PRRI research, 2016).

Part 2. A New Faith Forming Ecology

A new faith forming ecology must be responsive to the challenges of the twenty-first century world and the religious and spiritual needs of people today. I believe the new ecology needs to incorporate five, essential, interconnected components so that people are nurtured, equipped and supported in faith and discipleship. Each of these components must be attended to, so that a whole ecology can be created.

1. **Intergenerational faith formation** and whole community faith experiences for all ages and generations provide guided participation in a community of practice with intergenerational learning, relationships, and mentoring
2. **Family faith formation** incorporates growing in faith and practice as a whole family, nurturing the faith of children and adolescents at home, equipping parents (and grandparents) as faith formers, and engaging the whole family in the life and ministries of the faith community

3. **Life cycle faith formation** provides developmentally-appropriate and generationally-appropriate experiences, programs, and activities across the ten decades of life
4. **Missional faith formation** for the unaffiliated and uninvolved expands and extends the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live, and provides pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community
5. **Digitally enabled and connected faith formation** utilizes new digital technologies and media to reach and engage people in their daily lives anytime and anywhere, and expands faith formation through blended models combining online delivery of religious content and experiences with gathered events and programs.



Intergenerational Faith Formation

Become more intentional about strengthening the intergenerational character of our congregations and faith formation experiences using these three core strategies. (For more see *Generations Together*.)

1. **Create** new intergenerational programs and experiences that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping.
2. **Utilize** the intergenerational events and experiences of church life (worship/lectionary, seasons of the year, service/mission actions, prayer, etc.) as the primary “content” and experiences for faith formation in intergenerational programs or age-group programs. Use a three-part process:

1. *Prepare* people—intergenerationally or in age groups—with the knowledge and practices—for participating in a church event.
 2. *Experience/participate* in the intergenerational church event or experience.
 3. *Reflect* upon the meaning of the event and discover how to *live/practice* that learning in daily life (with online activities and resources. For example:
 - People learn about worship and how to worship in intergenerational settings or age groups; experience Sunday worship with the faith community and practice worshipping; and live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives (with activities and resources delivered online).
 - People learn about the justice issues of our day and the biblical and church teachings on justice, service, and care for creation in intergenerational settings or age groups; experience acts of justice and service with the faith community—locally and globally; and engage in the practices of serving those in need, caring for creation, and working for justice—as individuals, with their peers, with their families, and with their church and other groups and organizations.
3. **Connect** the generations through new activities and/or infuse intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing ministries and programs. For example:
- Incorporate intergenerational dialogues into programming.
 - Develop mentoring relationships (prayer partners, spiritual direction, service involvements, confirmation mentors)
 - Link people of different generations who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to other generations (midlife and older adults helping young adults and new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world).
 - Involve the community in praying for a generation (on a mission trip or retreat weekend, celebrating a milestone, such as the birth of a child, marriage, graduation, retirement).
 - Organize social and recreational activities that build intergenerational relationships.
 - Sponsoring community-wide service projects that engage all ages
 - Include other generations in current age-group programs, such as mission trips, service projects, retreat experiences, vacation Bible school, etc.

Family Faith Formation

Develop a comprehensive plan for family faith formation utilizing one or more of these eight strategies that make families the center of faith formation. (For more see *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*)

1. *Discovering God in Everyday Life*: guiding families to reflect on God’s presence in their daily life
2. *Forming Faith at Home through the Life Cycle*: equipping and resourcing families to practice their faith at home through prayer, devotions, reading the Bible, rituals, milestone celebrations, service, learning, and more (with activities and resources delivered online)
3. *Forming Faith through Milestones*: celebrating one-time milestones and annual milestones through experiences at home and in the congregation that activities of *naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing* (with activities and resources delivered online)

4. *Celebrating Seasonal Events through the Year*: celebrating church year seasons and calendar seasons at home, at church, and in the community (with activities and resources delivered online)
5. *Encountering God in the Bible through the Year*: reading and studying the Bible through Sunday worship and the lectionary, learning experiences, and at-home devotions and reading (with activities and resources delivered online)
6. *Connecting Families Intergenerationally*: developing intergenerational programs and experiences that engage families with other generations through learning, service, community life, etc.
7. *Developing a Strong Family Life*: cultivating a strong family life and strengthening developmental relationships through parent programs, whole family programs, family mentors, life cycle support groups, and online activities and resources.
8. *Empowering Parents and Grandparents*: developing parenting competencies and skills, promoting the faith growth of parents, and developing the faith forming skills of parents

Life Cycle Faith Formation

Develop age group and generational faith formation that addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of age groups and generations across the whole lifespan. Faith formation is developed around eight primary faith forming processes that facilitate faith growth and incorporate essential knowledge and practices of the Christian faith. These eight process provide both a *framework* for a comprehensive curriculum with age groups across the life cycle.

1. **Caring Relationships.** Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.
2. **Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons.** Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year as they tell the story of faith through the year in an organic and natural sequence of faith learning.
3. **Celebrating Rituals and Milestones.** Growing in faith and discipleship by celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones that provide a way to experience God’s love through significant moments in one’s life journey and faith journey .
4. **Learning the Christian Tradition and Applying It to Life.** Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition, reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world.
5. **Praying, Devotions, and Spiritual Formation.** Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.
6. **Reading the Bible.** Growing in faith and discipleship by encountering God in the Bible, and by studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today.
7. **Serving and Justice.** Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God’s creation, and action and advocacy for justice.
8. **Worshipping God.** Growing in faith and discipleship by worshipping God with the community of faith—praising God; giving thanks for God’s creative and redemptive work in the world; bringing our human joys and dilemmas to God; experiencing God’s living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission.

Missional Faith Formation

Design missional faith formation *expands and extends the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live—moving faith formation out into the community.* This involves developing targeted approaches and strategies designed around the particular needs and life situations of the unchurched and unaffiliated. These approaches and strategies need to be contextual—built around the congregation, community, and the needs of people. For example:

1. Develop community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
2. Open church events and programs to the whole community such as vacation Bible school.
3. Create a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page to connect with people.
4. Connect with people's life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
5. Connect with people during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, and more.
6. Develop high quality, relationship-building events designed to draw people from the wider community into relationships with people from your church such as social events, concerts, service projects, and children's programs.
7. Organize small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to faith-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
8. Sponsor community-wide service days and service projects that are open to everyone.
9. Create digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars that are offered online.

Create *pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community.* Missional faith formation guides people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment. The catechumenal process provides one example of a pathway with its ritual stages and formational content—participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation, development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. Programs like *The Alpha Course* cover the basics of Christianity in a multi-session course in a supportive small group environment. These types of programs and processes provide pathways for people to grow toward a life of discipleship and lifelong faith.

Part 3. Learning in the 21st Century

Characteristics of Learning in the 21st Century

1. Personalized—learning begins with the individual learner and his/her journey
2. Individualized—working at their own pace and exploring their interests
3. Immersive (direct experience) learning environments
4. Interactive
5. Engaged
6. Participatory
7. Experiential
8. Visual and Multimedia
9. Multi-Sensory—engaging all of a young person's senses, emotions, and intentions.
10. Abundant Content—accessible on demand
11. Episodic Experiences
12. Micro-learning Activities
13. Practice-Performance-Feedback—demonstrating progress and receiving feedback
14. Seamless Learning across Multiple Platforms
15. Production-centered

Descriptions of Characteristics of 21st Century Learning

- ✓ **Learner Centered Spaces:** Provide young people need spaces that are learner-centered and more personal in nature. Learning spaces need to be flexible, provide areas for movement, and promote collaboration and inquiry. These types of modern spaces resemble the local Starbucks more than they do the nearby cemetery.
- ✓ **Personalized Learning:** Design a learning environment that is sensitive to individual and group differences in background, prior knowledge, motivation and abilities, and offers tailored and detailed feedback. The learning experience must be made personal.
- ✓ **Learn by Doing:** Provide opportunities to apply new knowledge and skills by practicing in as realistic a setting as possible. Activities that involve thoughtful responses, decision-making and solving problems encourage active learning and also promote higher order thinking.
- ✓ **Learning is Social:** Create ways for young people to learn from each other, to interact, discuss and exchange information. Take the time to build a cohesive and safe community where participants will feel free to share, interact and work together. Manage the group to ensure that all participants are treated equally and with respect.
- ✓ **Storytelling:** Make learning stick through stories, tell relevant stories, present case studies and show examples. Talk about your own mistakes and your own successes. Allow young people to respond to stories and case studies. Let them exchange stories with each other.

- ✓ **Micro Learning:** Design learning into small bits of content and experiences. Our brains have a limited capacity to perceive and process information. Breaking content into small learning snacks, known as micro learning, will enhance comprehension and retention of knowledge and skills. For example, keep videos, lectures and tutorials brief.
- ✓ **Multiple Intelligences:** Integrate the eight multiple intelligences into learning experiences thereby provide a greater variety of ways for young people to learn: verbal-linguistic (word smart, book smart), logical-mathematical (number smart, logic smart), visual-spatial (art smart, picture smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body smart, movement smart), musical-rhythmic (music smart, sound smart), naturalist (nature smart, environment smart), interpersonal (people smart, group smart), and intrapersonal (self smart, introspection smart). While not every program can incorporate activities for all eight intelligences, having a greater variety of ways to learn promotes more effective learning and engages teens more fully in the learning experience.
- ✓ **Multisensory:** Utilize all of the senses in a learning experience where young people can taste, smell, touch, and hear things related to the topic of the session. iGen thinks of the world as a canvas to paint with words, sights, sounds, video, music, web pages, and anything they can create. Multimedia means using multiple modalities to engage young people. They are also a generation of “content creators” who live to create, and given the chance to do so they will merge multiple media into one complex but comprehensive whole.
- ✓ **Small Group Participation:** Incorporate small group participation as an essential component of all learning so that young people discuss and process together what they are learning, reflect on their experience, have the opportunity to question, and envision ways to practice what they are learning. Group participation requires creating an environment that is safe, caring, accepting, and trustworthy so that young people feel free to share, discuss, question, and apply.
- ✓ **Practice & Application:** Engage young people in practicing and performing what they are learning by incorporating real-life application activities in the learning experience. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it. Research is demonstrating that they learn more deeply when they apply knowledge to real-world problems and when they take part in projects that require sustained engagement and collaboration.
- ✓ **Learning Styles:** Apply research on learning styles to learning experiences by incorporating a diversity of learning activities and methods in a learning experience, recognizing that some people learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences, some through reflective observation, some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts, and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices.
- ✓ **Project-Based Learning:** Incorporate project-based learning which involves completing complex tasks that typically result in a realistic product, event, or presentation. Project-based learning is 1) organized around driving questions that lead young people to encounter central concepts or principles; 2) focused on a constructive investigation that involves inquiry and knowledge building; 3) learner-driven, in that the young people are responsible for making choices and for designing and managing their work; and 4) authentic, by posing problems that occur in the real world and that people care about.

- ✓ **Collaborative:** Engage young people in collaborative learning—working in small, non-competitive groups—where they can discuss and process together what they are learning, work together on projects and activities, and practice and present what they are learning. Learning spaces are organized for learners’ participation in a “learning community”—recognizing that learning takes place in a social context and relies on communication and interaction with others.
- ✓ **Visual:** Guides young people in learning to “read” or interpret visual images and how to use visual images to communicate. Visual literacy includes: 1) interpreting, understanding, and appreciating the meaning of visual images, 2) communicating more effectively by applying the basic principles and concepts of visual design, 3) producing visual images using computers and other technologies, and 4) using visual thinking to conceptualize solutions to problems

Personalized Learning

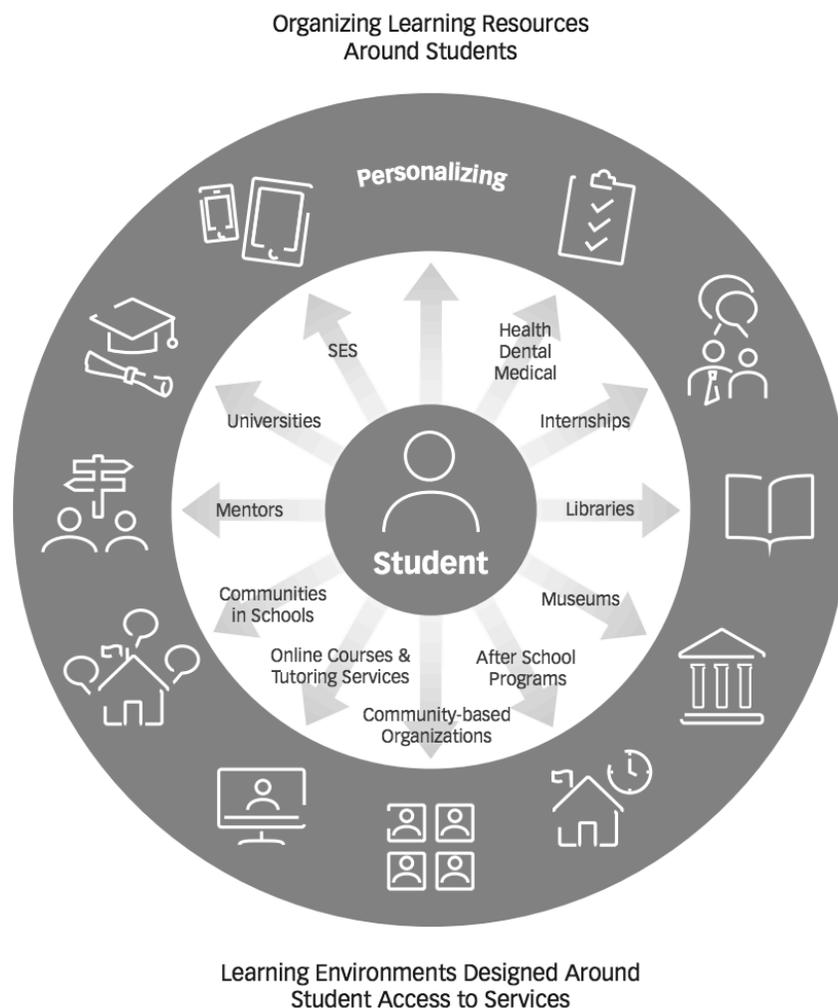
Working Definition of Personalized Learning: *Personalized learning is tailoring learning for each student’s strengths, needs and interests— including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn— to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible.*

- ✓ Personalization is an understanding that tapping into unique interests, individual styles, and specific needs can make work and learning meaningful and authentic.
- ✓ Personalization is asking each student, “What is best for you?”
- ✓ Personalization is about relationships, knowing each individual student based on their academic and personal interests.
- ✓ Personalization is students accessing a curriculum that meets their individual needs, reflects their zone of proximal development, and gives them the opportunity to access resources to progress at their personal rate of learning.
- ✓ Personalization is engaging students with personal learner plans, where contributions from students, parents, support staff, and teachers provide a path for ubiquitous learning to address students’ individual needs, interests, and learning styles.
- ✓ Personalization is every student learning at his/her own pace using the tools that help them learn and augment their strengths.
- ✓ Personalization is meeting the learner where they are, determining where they need to be, and finding and scaffolding the right zone of proximal development to get them there.

What does personalization look like? Personalized learning...

- ✓ Is an education full of variety and choice;
- ✓ Always involves a relationship between the teacher and the student, as well as a strong sense of community within the class as a whole;
- ✓ Is a space where students have access to a wide range of subjects that meet their pathway needs and interests;
- ✓ Is, within each subject, a students’ right to access learning experiences that enable them to progress according to their level of ability;

- ✓ Is an opportunity for students to make decisions about the direction of their learning; for example, they can pick the topic they are going to research for an assignment, the book for their book chats, and how they want to write the procedures for their lab work;
- ✓ Is a dynamic learning opportunity providing students with content that addresses their personal learning needs based on their interests, parental input, and teacher observation as well as assessment data, which is the most important element;
- ✓ Is students managing their own work calendars and daily schedules to stay on track, so they are free to move through courses at their own pace and have individualized learning paths and intervention plans;
- ✓ Is students using personal learning devices, such as mobile devices to individualize their learning and improve communication within the school community;
- ✓ Is the school community including multiple layers of support;
- ✓ Is students interacting and collaborating with each other and with the content;
- ✓ Emphasizes teachers interacting with the content, with students and with other teachers;
- ✓ Necessitates social-emotional connections built between students and teachers as the foundation of their work together;
- ✓ Means various starting points within content, varied amounts of guided practice and independent practice as needed.



Digitally Enabled and Connected Faith Formation

Design faith formation that is *digitally-enabled*—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and *digitally-connected*—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media and/or reaching people at home and in daily life with online faith formation content and experiences that connect to church life and events.

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

Blended Faith Formation

Online

Face-to-Face

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

1. **Gathered Program with Online Content:** We can design a gathered program using online content from websites, videos from YouTube or other video sites, and blogs and other social media. With an abundance of high quality digital content, this first option is the easiest way to bring the digital world into a gathered program.
2. **Gathered Program and Online Content:** We can connect church programs or events with online content that extends and deepens the experience through learning, prayer, ritual, action, etc. Gathered events and programs such as Sunday worship, church year feasts and seasons intergenerational and family programs, classes, youth group meetings, mission trips, retreat experiences, and vacation Bible school would all benefit from extending the experience with digital content for learning, praying, celebrating, having faith conversations, acting/serving, and more.

Example: Provide a complete faith formation experience online connected to the life of the church, e.g., forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events at church with online content for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life.

3. **Online and Gathered:** We can “flip the classroom or program” by creating a digital platform to provide the content that people would learn in the gathered setting in an online learning space using print, audio, video, and more. And then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration.

Example: “Flip the classroom or program” by creating a digital platform to provide the content that people would learn in the gathered setting in an online learning space using print, audio, video, and more. And then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration. One example is redesigning children’s faith formation so that children and their parents are learning online at home and doing activities together, and then refocusing “class time” to engage children in creating projects and activities that demonstrate their learning. Another example is designing a high school confirmation program that provides the content that used to be taught in the weekly sessions in an online platform for individual learning—watching videos, reading short materials, and writing a reflection journals; engages the young people in small groups during the month to discuss their online learning; and then meets monthly in a large group gathered session for discussion, interactive activities, and application of the content to living as a Christian today. During the year retreats, worship, and service projects offer additional gathered sessions.

4. **Mostly Online:** We can offer opportunities for individuals, families, and small groups to utilize the digital platform as their primary learning setting and provide opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings or in a web conference format.

Example: Offer six, one-hour parent webinar programs delivered to parents at home in four-month semesters: three webinars followed by a parent gathering at church; three more webinars and concluding with a parent gathering at church. Another example is developing an online Bible study where groups can meet regularly in a physical setting or virtually through Skype or a Google+ Hangout for sharing their learning.

5. **Fully Online:** The rise of high quality and easily accessible online religious content—courses, activities, print and e-books, audio and video programs, and content-rich websites—has made designing online faith formation feasible.

Example: Offer adults a variety of online Bible and theology courses for individual study using online courses from colleges, and seminaries, video programs on YouTube, online programs and webinars from religious publishers and organizations. Another example is providing an online prayer and spirituality center where people can access daily prayer reflections and devotions, offer prayer intentions, pray for others, learn about spiritual practices, download prayer activities for the home, and more.

Focus Group Research Guide

An excellent way to gather information about people in the *congregation and* community is through focus groups. Organize two focus groups of eight to twelve people from among the target audience. Select a diversity of people in each focus group, reflecting ethnic/cultural diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and spiritual and religious diversity (from the actively engaged to the “churchless” thus some of the members of the focus groups may be from the congregation and some from the community).

Meet for about one hour in different locations and times. Remember that people who are not involved in church may be hesitant to come to a meeting at church. Have two people lead each focus group – one to record (on a computer or tablet is preferable) and one to ask the questions. The recorder can also ask follow-up questions as appropriate.

Introduction by Focus Group Leaders: *Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to be in this focus group discussion. This discussion is an important element in our congregation’s desire to better serve its people and its surrounding community. I have a few questions for us to discuss; during this discussion, we will be taking a few notes so that we can more accurately recall our conversation. While this information will inform our study, no names will be attached to any of this discussion.*

Use the following questions as a guide for developing your focus group interviews – adapt the number and character of the questions based on the selection of your target audience(s). Each focus group needs to ask the same questions so that comparisons can be made across the two groups. Keep the group moving through the questions; don’t get “stuck” on any one question. The goal is to surface lots of information from group members, not to conduct a group discussion of the questions.

Focus Group Questions

(Questions in [] are intended as follow-up questions.)

1. How would you describe our target audience (age group, families, whole community) in key words or phrases? What are some of the important life issues that our target audience is experiencing today?
2. What are the significant spiritual issues that our target audience (age group, families, whole community) is experiencing today?
3. What is most important to you about being a Christian today?
4. How do you live your Christian faith? Name some of the ways you put your faith into practice.
5. Can you tell me about how our church helps you [and your family when appropriate] grow as Christians? How does the church support, strengthen, and challenge your faith? [What practices and/or experiences are of importance to you and your faith?]

6. How would you describe the community life at our church? [Do you see people experiencing a life-giving spiritual community of hospitality, welcoming, love, and support?]
7. How do you see people experiencing worship at our church? What words would you use to describe the worship experience? [Do they speak of it as engaging? Is worship at our church easy to understand? Does it seem relevant to daily life?]
8. How is our church engaged in service to the community and the world? What is our target audience doing to live out our mission and service to the community and world?
9. For parents: How does our church nurture the faith life of the whole family? How does our church equip parents/grandparents to share faith and live faith practices at home?
10. How can our church help you to continue growing as a Christian? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see our church offer for your age group?

Compiling and Analyzing Focus Group Results

Use the following process to find the key themes that have emerged from the focus groups: (The goal is to “make as much sense as you can” out of what you have heard):

1. Compile the responses for each question from both of the focus groups.
 - Enter all your notes from the each of the focus groups into a computer file, thus collating all of the responses into one document for each focus group, question-by-question.
 - Print the collated responses to each question on separate newsprint sheets. Place the newsprint sheets on the wall. (Do this and the following processes for each of the two focus groups).
2. As a team review the responses to each question.
 - If you find responses to a question that are identical in language or similar in content, give these identical or similar items the same number beginning with #1.
 - Continue to do this for all related items. Some items will not relate to any other items...let them stand alone.
3. Next place blank sheets of newsprint on the wall. Name and write in one phrase or sentence the core content of each of the most frequently mentioned responses. These are themes.
4. Develop a summary report for each question that focuses on the top priority themes but also includes all the items. For some questions this may only be 4 or 5 themes; for other questions there may be as 8 or 10 themes.
5. Finally, compare the themes and items from each of the focus groups with each other. Look for commonalities and differences. Develop one list of top priority themes.

Congregational Faith Formation Assessment

The Congregational Faith Formation Assessment tool provides a way for your congregation to examine how it is forming faith through congregational life, family faith formation, age-group faith formation, missional faith formation and leadership. Engage the whole team (and other leadership groups) in completing the assessment tool. Rate each item on a scale from poor practice (1) to excellent practice (4). Items that receive a rating of 4 (excellent) or 3 (good) indicate areas of strength. Items that receive a 2 (adequate) or 1 (poor) indicate areas for growth. Analyze the results and circle the items that are in need of attention and development (scores of 1 or 2) and items that your congregation wants to strengthen even if it received a score of 3 (good).

Part 1. The Congregation Creates a Faith Forming Culture

	Practice			
	1=poor	2	3	4=excellent
1. God's Living Presence: People experience God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.	1	2	3	4
2. Discipleship: People learn who God is and come to know Jesus Christ personally; learn how to be Christian; and how to discover the meaning of the Bible for their lives.	1	2	3	4
3. Community: People experience a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love; characterized by hospitality, welcoming, love, and support.	1	2	3	4
4. Worship: People experience spiritually uplifting worship experiences that are enlightening, fulfilling, inspiring, interesting, easy to understand, and relevant in daily life.	1	2	3	4
5. Liturgical Seasons: People experience the Story of Faith through the celebration of the feasts and seasons of the church year.	1	2	3	4
6. Rituals and Milestones: People experience God's love through rituals, sacraments, and milestones that celebrate significant moments in one's life and faith journey.	1	2	3	4
7. Prayer: People experience the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and spiritual disciplines/practices.	1	2	3	4
8. Learning: People grow in faith understanding by learning the content of the Christian tradition, reflecting upon that content, integrating it their lives, and living its meaning in the world.	1	2	3	4
9. Moral Responsibility: People develop ethical/moral responsibility—learning about Christian perspectives on moral questions and how to apply their faith to decisions about what's right and wrong.	1	2	3	4
10. Service & Justice: People are engaged, locally and globally, in serving those in need, working for justice, and caring for God's creation.	1	2	3	4
11. Intergenerational Relationships: People develop intergenerational relationships and community where the Christian faith is shared, modeled, and lived.	1	2	3	4
12. Intergenerational Faith Experiences: People are engaged in intergenerational faith experiences and activities of worship, prayer, learning, and service as an integral aspect of congregational life.	1	2	3	4
13. Digital Ministry: People can grow in faith and discipleship through online faith forming content and social connections on the congregation's website(s) which provides content and experiences to extend participation in congregational life and ministries into daily life.	1	2	3	4

Part 2. The Congregation Equips Parents and Families

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent			
14. Parental Faith: The congregation helps parents and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship, and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.	1	2	3	4
15. Parenting for Faith Growth: The congregation teaches parents and grandparents the knowledge and skills for forming faith at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible.	1	2	3	4
16. Parenting: The congregation equips parent and grandparents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting today, and how to develop a develop a close, warm, and affirming parenting style that promotes religious transmission at home.	1	2	3	4
17. Family Faith Experiences: The congregation provides whole family experiences that promote growth in faith and discipleship, and teach parents how to share faith and live faith practices at home.	1	2	3	4
18. Family Faith Practices: The congregation provides families with resources to nurture growth in Christian faith and practice at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible	1	2	3	4
19. Family Assets: The congregation strengthens family life by developing the assets that build strong families: nurturing family relationships, establishing family shared activities and traditions, maintaining family expectations and rules, adapting to daily challenges, and connecting to the community.	1	2	3	4
20. Digital Ministry with Families: The congregation connects with families at home through an online ministry (family website, social media) that provides social interaction and a variety of content (print, audio, video, websites) for family faith practices, parent faith formation, parenting, and family asset development.	1	2	3	4

Part 3. The Congregation Embraces Lifelong Faith Growth & Practice

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent			
21. Lifelong: The congregation provides a continuity of ministry and faith formation across the whole lifecycle from children through older adults that promotes growth in Christian faith and discipleship in age-appropriate ways at each stage of life.	1	2	3	4
22. Programming: The congregation offers a variety of age-specific experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections for every stage of life that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces, and conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.	1	2	3	4
23. Online: The congregation uses their own website(s), as an integral component of age-group ministry and faith formation, that extends gathered ministries/programs through online content (print, audio, video) and experiences, blends online and gathered activities in individual programs, and offers online-only programs, activities, and resources—all of which are available anytime, anywhere.	1	2	3	4
24. Children: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of children through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1	2	3	4

25. Youth: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of youth through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1 2 3 4
26. Young Adults: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of young adults through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1 2 3 4
27. Adults: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of adults through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1 2 3 4

Part 4. The Congregation Engages in Missional Outreach

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent
28. Outreach: The congregation expands and extends the church’s presence through outreach, relationship building, and engagement with people who are not engaged in the faith community – the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.	1 2 3 4
29. Outreach: The congregation offers faith formation targeted to the needs of the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.	1 2 3 4
30. Pathways: The congregation provides pathways (programs, activities, experiences) for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community – guiding people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment.	1 2 3 4

Part 5. The Congregation Has Faithful, Competent Leadership

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent
31. Spiritual Influence: The pastor and ministry leaders know and model the transforming presence of God in their lives and ministries.	1 2 3 4
32. Interpersonal Competence: The pastor and ministry leaders build relationships and community in the congregation, as well as in their ministries and programs.	1 2 3 4
33. Competent Leadership: The pastor and ministry leaders demonstrate effective leadership by modeling the way—aligning values and actions, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process—being innovative and experimenting, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart of others—affirming and celebrating contributions.	1 2 3 4
34. Competent Ministry: The pastor and ministry leaders reflect superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill for leadership in the congregation and their ministries.	1 2 3 4
35. Volunteer Leadership: The pastor and ministry leaders nurture the faith and theological knowledge of volunteer leaders, equip them with knowledge and skills for their ministry, and provide continuing support and mentoring	1 2 3 4