



# Faith Formation 2020

*Envisioning Dynamic, Engaging and Inspiring Faith Formation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

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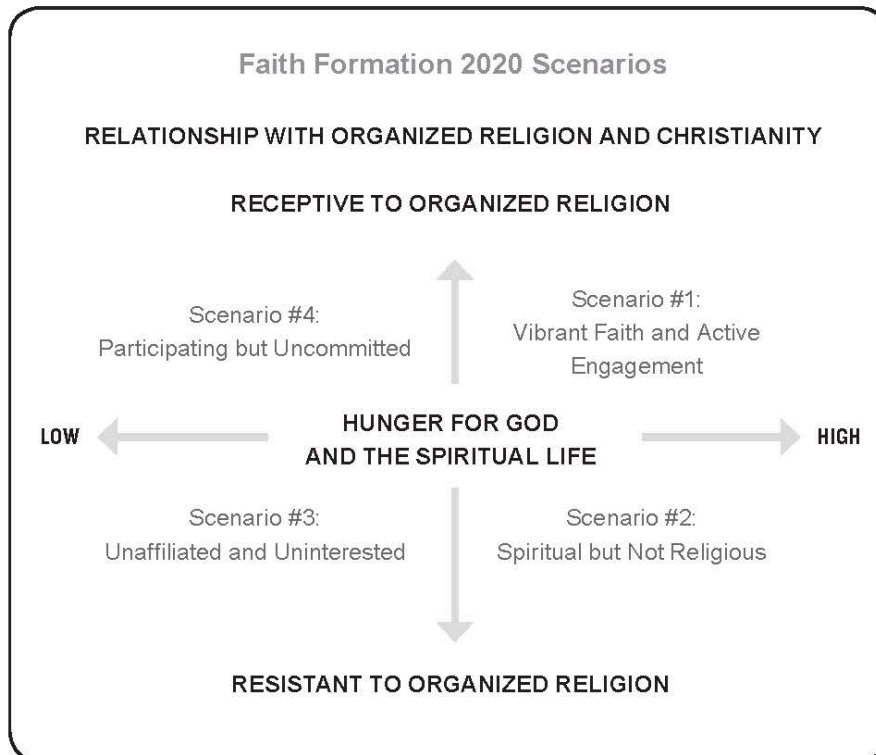
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- *What could faith formation in Christian churches look like in 2020?*
- *Specifically, how can Christian congregations provide vibrant faith formation to address the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations over the next 10 years?*
- *How can churches envision the shape of faith formation in the year 2020 and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

## 1. Eight Significant Driving Forces Influencing Faith Formation 2020

1. Declining Number of Christians and Growing Number of People with No Religious Affiliation
2. Increasing Number of People Becoming More “Spiritual” and Less “Religious”
3. Declining Participation in Christian Churches
4. Increasing Diversity and Pluralism in U.S. Society
5. Increasing Influence of Individualism on Christian Identity and Community Life
6. Changing Patterns of Marriage and Family Life
7. Declining Family Religious Socialization
8. Increasing Impact of Digital Media and Web Technologies

## 2. Four Scenarios for Faith Formation 2020



The scenarios express a range of possible futures facing congregational faith formation over the decade from 2010 to 2020. Each scenario story explains why the “main story” of faith formation in 2020 will be framed by the response of Christian churches to people’s relationship—their attitudes and responses—to organized religion (receptive or resistant) and to people’s hunger for and openness to God and the spiritual life (high or low). The scenarios that follow are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive—rather they are designed to be both plausible and challenging, to engage your imagination while also raising new questions about what the future of faith formation might look and feel like. *Imagine what faith formation could look and feel like in your congregation if your church is responding to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario. Imagine the life of your congregation in 2020 if faith formation addresses the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations in each scenario over the next 10 years.*

## **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.

### **3. Strategies & Ideas for Bringing the Four Faith Formation Scenarios to Life**

Strategy 1. Faith Formation through the Life of the Whole Church (Scenarios 1 and 4)

Strategy 2. Faith Formation using Digital Media and Web Technologies (All Scenarios)

Strategy 3. Family Faith Formation (Scenarios 1, 2, and 4)

Strategy 4. Intergenerational Faith Formation (Scenarios 1 and 4)

Strategy 5. Generational Faith Formation (Scenarios 1, 2, and 4)

Strategy 6. Milestones Faith Formation (All Scenarios)

Strategy 7. Faith Formation in Christian Practices (All Scenarios)

Strategy 8. Transforming the World: Engagement in and Formation for Service and Mission (All Scenarios)

Strategy 9. Spiritual Formation (All Scenarios)

Strategy 10. Multi-Ethnic Faith Formation (All Scenarios)

Strategy 11. Faith Formation for Spiritual Seekers (Scenario 2)

Strategy 12. Apprenticeships in Discipleship (Scenarios 2 and 4)

Strategy 13. Pathways to Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement (Scenarios 2 and 4)

Strategy 14. Faith Formation in Third Place Settings (Scenarios 2 and 3)

Strategy 15. Empowering the Community to Share their Faith (Scenario 1)

Strategy 16. Interfaith Education and Dialogue (Scenario 1)

### **4. Developing a Lifelong Faith Formation Network**

*How can congregations design the future of faith formation using the four scenarios as a guide for addressing the life situations and spiritual and religious needs of a wide diversity of people?* The future of faith formation will, in large part, be determined by how well churches provide comprehensive, lifelong faith formation that is inclusive of all ages and generations and responsive to the diverse life situations, and spiritual and religious needs of people in all four scenarios: people of vibrant faith and active engagement in a church, people who participate in church life but are not spiritually committed, people who are spiritual but not engaged in a church community, and people who are uninterested in the spiritual life and not affiliated with a church community.

One way to provide comprehensive faith formation for everyone, anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365 is by developing a *Lifelong Faith Formation Network* of programs, activities, and resources that incorporate a variety of ways to learn in a blended approach to faith formation integrating physical face-to-face settings and virtual online settings and utilizing utilizes a wide variety of faith formation resources and programs, people and communities. The design process integrates your church's current faith formation programs, activities, and resources with the creation of new initiatives—strategies, programs, activities, resources—specifically designed to address new spiritual and religious needs of people in each scenario.

## Key Features of a Lifelong Faith Formation Network

A Lifelong Faith Formation Network is a way to provide faith formation for everyone, anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365. The Network approach to lifelong faith formation has six key features:

1. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, spiritual and religious needs, and interests of all ages and generations in the four scenarios by offering a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources.
2. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* guides individuals and families in discerning their spiritual and religious needs and creating personal learning pathways—a seasonal or annual plan for faith growth and learning.
3. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* incorporates informal learning, as well as formal learning in faith formation.
4. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* utilizes a variety of faith formation models to address the diverse life tasks and situations, religious and spiritual needs, and interests of people: learning on your own, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and in the community and world.
5. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* blends face-to-face, interactive faith formation programs and activities with virtual, online faith formation programs, activities, and resources.
6. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* incorporates communities of practice to connect individuals and groups throughout the congregation.

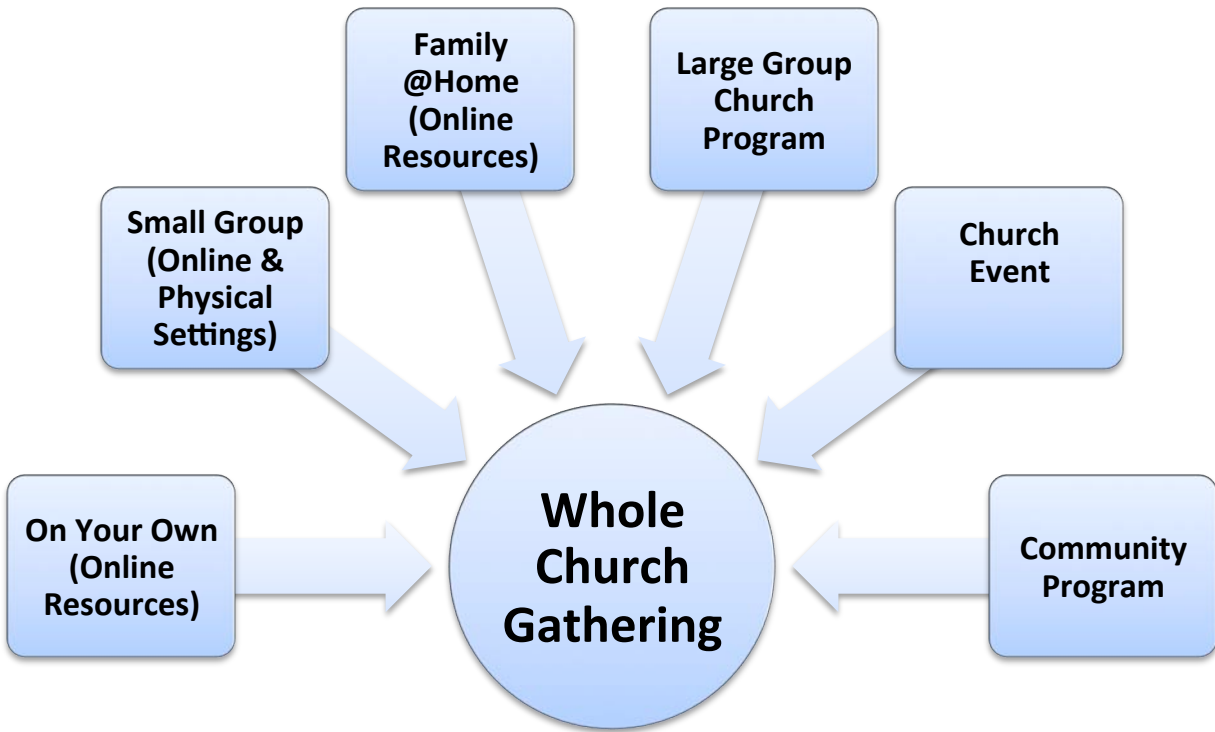
## Illustrations of a Network Approach

Utilize a variety of faith formation models to address the diverse life tasks and situations, religious and spiritual needs, and interests of people. Blend face-to-face, gathered faith formation in physical settings with virtual, online faith formation.

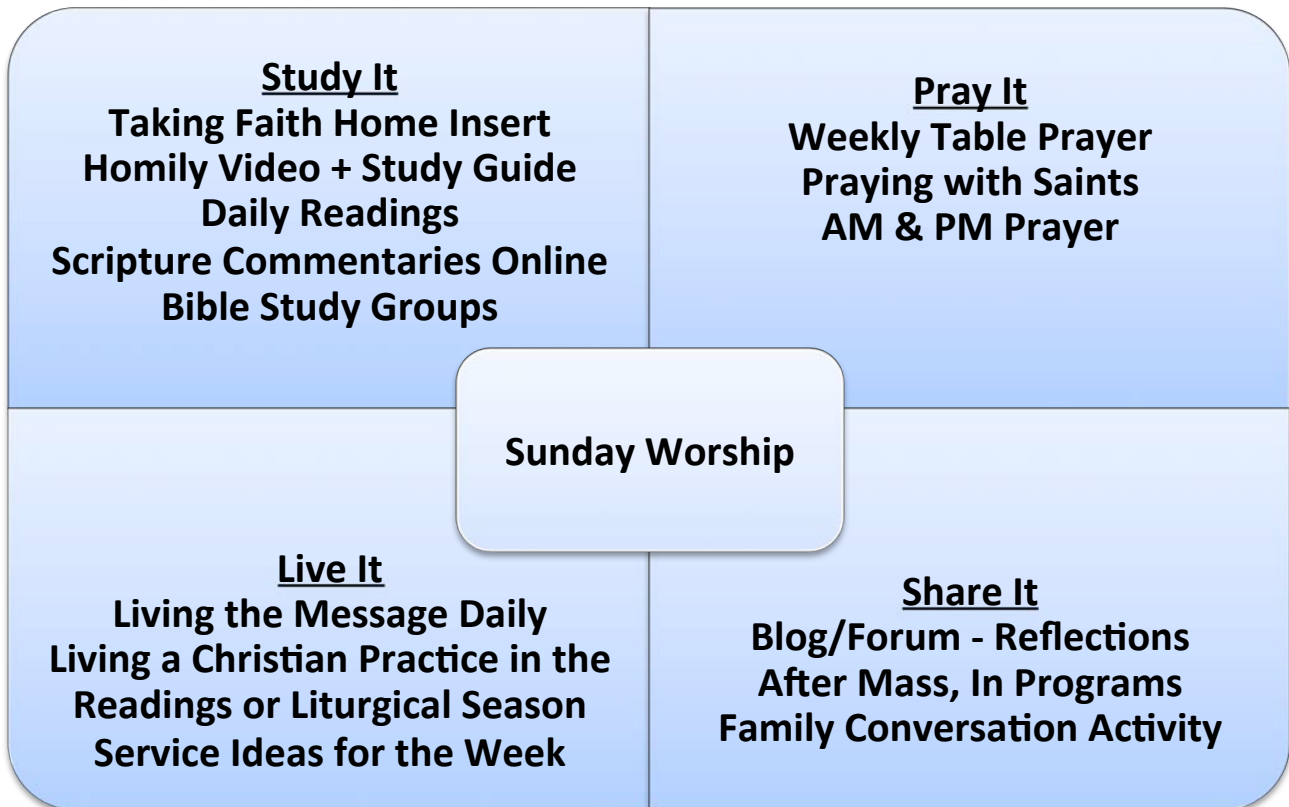
- **Faith Formation on Your Own:** through reading, online courses, audio and video programs, movies, television programs
- **Faith Formation at Home:** through Bible reading, storytelling and caring conversation, prayer and devotions, rituals and traditions, service
- **Faith Formation in Small Groups:** through Bible and theology study groups, social issues study groups, faith sharing groups, lectionary-based groups, service/mission action groups, support groups, special interest 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.

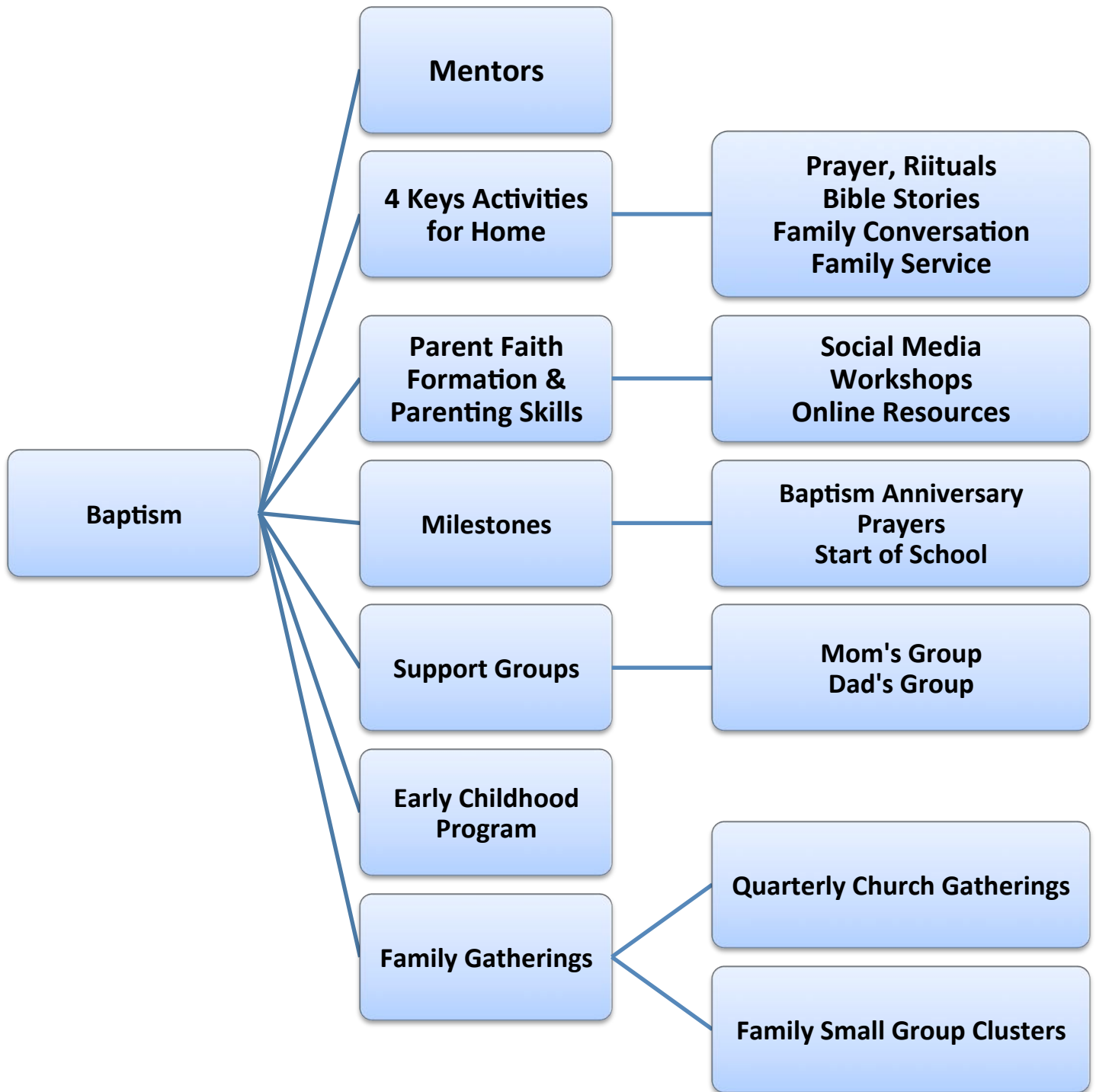
## Approach #1. From Individualized Faith Formation to Whole Church Gathering



## Approach #2. From Gathered Event into Everyday Life



### Approach #3. Targeted Group



# A Network Approach to Faith Formation

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