

# Creating an Intergenerational Church Culture

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## Websites

1. [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com)
2. [www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com](http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com)
3. [www.intergenerationalfaith.com](http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com)
4. [www.curatingfaithformation.com](http://www.curatingfaithformation.com)
5. <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>
6. <http://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com>
7. [www.faithformationlearningexchange.net](http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net)
8. [www.weebly.com](http://www.weebly.com)
9. <http://vibrantfaithathome.org>

## Faith Forming Processes

We can discern at least *eight essential processes of forming faith*, informed by Scripture, theology, research, and contemporary reflection, that promote faith growth and discipleship with age groups, families, and the whole faith community. The eight essential faith forming processes – involving knowledge and practices of the Christian faith – facilitate faith growth *and* make a significant difference in the lives of children, youth, adults, and families. These eight faith forming processes are central to Christian lifelong faith formation. They provide a foundation to address the challenge of religious transmission from generation to generation, and promote lifelong growth in faith and discipleship. The eight processes include:

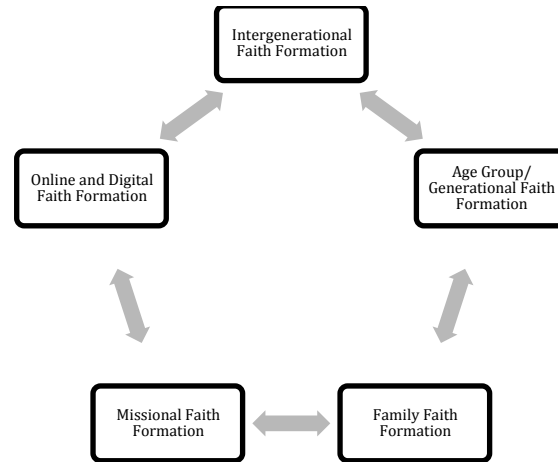
1. **Caring Relationships.** Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love – in the congregation and family.
2. **Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons.** Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing 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. **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.
5. **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.
6. **Praying, Devotions, and Spiritual Formation.** Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.
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.

## A New Faith Formation Ecosystem

For well over 100 years in the United States, Christian churches had a highly integrated religious ecosystem. It was comprised of multigenerational family faith practice and religious transmission at home; strong congregational community relationships and church life, especially participation in Sunday worship; weekly Sunday school for children and youth (and in many cases adults); and church groups (youth, men, women). Many Christian traditions relied heavily on the ethnic faith traditions of their people to transmit faith from generation to generation – at home and at church. *And* all of this was surrounded by an American culture that explicitly or implicitly supported the Christian value system and Christian practices.

There is no way to go back to this older ecosystem – it has eroded over the past several decades because of all the changes in the culture and society, the family, technology and communication, and more. The environment has changed, and the relationship between congregational faith formation and its environment has changed. *We need a new faith formation ecosystem that reflects this changed context.* This new ecosystem incorporates five, essential, interconnected components:

1. *Intergenerational faith formation in the congregation*
2. *Age group and generational faith formation in a variety of physical places and online spaces*
3. *Family faith formation at home*
4. *Missional faith formation to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated*
5. *Online and digital faith formation*



## Intergenerational Curriculum

intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences are at the center of the new faith formation ecosystem. “Throughout Scripture there is a pervasive sense that all generations were typically present when faith communities gathered for worship, for celebration, for feasting, for praise, for encouragement, for reading of Scripture, in times of danger, and for support and service. . . . To experience authentic Christian community and reap the unique blessings of intergenerationality, the generations must be together regularly and often – infants to octogenarians” (Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 84).

This is the recognition that congregations themselves teach. People learn by participating in the life of a community. Practices of faith are taught through the interrelationships of worship, learning, service, ritual, prayer, and more. Among the events central to the Christian community are the feasts and seasons of the church year, Sunday worship and the lectionary, sacramental and ritual celebrations, holidays and holydays, works of justice and acts of service, times of prayer, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. A faith forming education that is centered in the life of the Christian community is intrinsically an intergenerational experience.

Intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences are at the center of the new faith formation ecosystem. Becoming intentionally intergenerational would:

- Form and deepen Christian identity and commitment as people develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and live the Christian tradition and way of life.
- Provide a curriculum for the whole community – Sunday worship, the lectionary and church year seasons, learning, service, ritual and sacraments, prayer, and more – that is a shared experience in faith and belonging for everyone.
- Strengthen relationships, connections, and community across generations; enhance their sense of belonging in the faith community; and provide valuable adult role models for children and adolescents.
- Support families by surrounding them with a community of faith and engaging the whole family in a variety of faith-forming experiences together (caring relationships, celebrating, learning, praying, serving); and providing parents with opportunities to learn from Christians who are practicing their faith and raising faithful children.

- Strengthen the ability (confidence and competence) of parents and grandparents to promote religious socialization at home; be role models of faithful practice; and engage in faith practices at home and develop warm, affirming, and unconditionally supporting relationships between parents (and grandparents) and their children, teens, and young adults.

Intergenerational learning provides people of all generations the opportunity to prepare – with the appropriate knowledge and practices – for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith and to guide their participation and reflection upon those events. In a variety of formats – large group and small group – intergenerational learning provides variety of activities to address all ages: developmentally-appropriate, experiential, multisensory, and interactive.

## Intergenerational Church Life and Events

Central to 21<sup>st</sup> century faith formation is guided participation in a community of practice. Joyce Mercer makes the key point that this is not just “doing.” It includes fully and actively practicing our faith in everyday life and making theological meaning out of the stuff of everyday life. Theological themes and faith practices are embedded in the experience of church life throughout the year and are an integral element of the curriculum. For example:

- *The feasts and seasons of the church year* provide a natural rhythm and calendar to the curriculum: Advent and Christmas Seasons, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lenten Season, Holy Week, Easter, Easter Season, Pentecost, All Saints and All Souls, and remembrances of saints and holy people throughout the year
- The *Revised Common and Catholic Lectionaries* provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its three-year cycle of weekly readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels built around the seasons of the church year. The *Narrative Lectionary* is a four-year cycle of readings from September through May each year following the sweep of the biblical story, from Creation through the early Christian church.
- *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life: baptism, confirmation, first Bible, first communion, graduation, marriage, funerals, and much more.
- *Acts of service and justice* – locally and globally – provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teachings on service, justice, care for the earth.

When the experiences of church life are the focus of intergenerational and age group learning, we have the opportunity to *prepare* people – with the appropriate knowledge and practices – for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith, and to *guide* their *participation* and *reflection* upon those events.

Faith Forming Processes	Church Life and Events
Caring Relationships	
Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons	
Celebrating Rituals and Milestones	
Learning the Christian Tradition	
Praying and Spiritual Formation	
Reading the Bible	
Serving People in Need, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation	
Worshipping God	