

Principles & Design Process for an Adult Faith Formation Network

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What would it be like if your church embraced the audacious claim that you could provide faith formation for every adult in your faith community?

What new insights and assumptions about adult faith formation would you need to adopt? What would a "faith formation for every adult" plan look like? Where could you possibly find all of the leaders and resources to offer faith formation for every adult in your church? What would it be like if you conceptualized adult faith formation, not as a series of program offerings, but as a network—a diverse community of learning?

Most Christian churches have similar goals for adult faith formation. Churches want faith formation for adults that helps them to grow in their relationship with God, develop a deeper understanding of the Bible and their faith tradition, relate the Christian faith to life today, participate in the life and ministries of the faith community, and live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily life at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world. Churches want faith formation that touches the head, the heart, and actions of adults. They want faith formation that informs, forms, and transforms.

The question today is not what do we want to accomplish, but rather how can accomplish these goals for every adult in our faith communities. It's all about delivery systems. How can we utilize the life of our church community; the variety of excellent print, audio, and visual resources; the variety of learning models; and the new digital and online technologies to develop a faith formation plan that addresses the wide diversity of interests, religious and spiritual needs, and life tasks and situations of today's adults. This article describes the concept of an "Adult Faith Formation Network" as a way to provide faith formation for every adult in your church and offers practical tools to help you build an Adult Faith Formation Network in your church.

Part 1. Four Principles of an Adult Faith Formation Network

1. Adult faith formation addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, spiritual and religious needs, and interests of adults in the church by offering a variety of content topics and learning activities out of which adults can develop their own personalized learning pathway.

To address the increasing diversity within the adult population, churches need to offer a greater variety of adult faith formation topics and activities. In the past churches have often chosen the "one size fits all" mentality for adult faith formation: How do we get every adult to participate in a small faith sharing group or to come to the Lenten series or to study the Bible? Adult faith formation is no longer about finding *the* program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with a variety of faith formation activities. It is offering faith formation programming that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing. It is meeting individuals at the point of their spiritual and learning needs and offering personalized pathways of faith growth. Adults can create their individual "faith growth learning plans" to help them identify where they are on their spiritual journey, what they need, who else might share that need, and the resources that could help them meet that need. By expanding the options for adult learning (offering "something for everyone"), churches can engage more adults in faith formation, even if some of the offerings involve only one person.

Today, as never before, a local church has access to adult faith formation programming, resources, and networks, that can address the diversity. Resources for learning abound in every environment; a primary task of a learning system is to identify these resources and link learners with them effectively. Consider this: iTunes University, part of the iTunes Store, is possibly the world's greatest collection of free educational media available to students, teachers, and lifelong learners. With over 200,000 educational audio and video files available, iTunes U has quickly become the engine for the mobile learning movement. It puts courses and resources from over 150 universities and learning organizations into the hands of individuals, groups, and organizations. The new reality of faith formation programming is that churches can offer activities that cater to niches— individuals and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue. They no longer have to worry about reaching a “mass audience.”

The culture of our day is all about personalization and customization. We have moved from a “one size fits all” mentality in our culture and economics. Several decades ago the typical bookstore at the mall featured several dozen books on the NY Times best seller lists, books by popular bestselling authors, and a very limited variety of specialized titles. In the early 1990s Borders and Barnes and Noble opened megastores with 100,000 titles that addressed a wide diversity of customers' needs and interests. In 1995 Amazon.com opened for business online with millions of titles, addressing an even greater diversity of readers' needs and interests. Amazon.com will even recommend books to you based on the interests expressed in your previous book purchases.

The same personalization and customization can be seen in music and in films. More than 99 percent of music albums on the market today are not available in Wal-Mart. However, iTunes offers millions of songs online available for download 24x7, and is constantly adding music, both old and new. Of the more than 200,000 films, TV shows, documentaries, and other videos that have been released commercially, the average Blockbuster store carries just 3,000 titles. However, Netflix has over 100,000 DVDs available for rental online and delivered to your home in about one business day. By offering such great diversity Amazon.com, iTunes, and Netflix not only make money on the “blockbusters” they sell/rent, but also on every title in their vast storehouse, even if they only sell/rent one copy a month. (Amazon.com, iTunes, and Netflix are only three examples of the

transformation taking place in business and culture today.)

By consulting research findings and listening carefully to adults of different age groups, church leaders can determine foundational spiritual and religious needs, interests, and life tasks that adult faith formation should address. Using this knowledge, churches can expand their faith formation programming to offer enough variety that each adult in the faith community can find a learning experience that addresses his or her spiritual and religious needs, life tasks, and/or interests. Consider using the following categories to identify the needs and interests of adults in your church.

- **Life Issues:** What's happening in the lives and world of adults today and how does the Christian faith connect to these issues? How can faith formation help adults view the myriad dimensions of human life today— family, work, leisure, relationships, sexuality, suffering and grief, social and political issues, community issues—in the light of the Gospel and faith tradition? How can faith formation equip and support adults in making life choices and moral decisions as Christians?
- **Life Tasks:** What are the developmental life tasks facing adults in the major life periods: 20s-30s, 40s-50s, 60s-70s, 80s-90s? How can faith formation integrate continued faith growth with life tasks at each stage of adulthood?
- **Milestones and Transitions:** What are the significant milestones/transitions in adulthood that can be a focus of adult faith formation, such as geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, empty nests, retirement, unanticipated illness, divorce, and the loss of loved ones? How can faith formation help people find meaning in their lives during these transitions and bring a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing?
- **Religious Needs:** What are the significant religious learning needs of adults at each stage of adulthood? How can faith formation provide adults with opportunities to deepen their understanding of the Bible and their faith tradition and beliefs, and relate their Christian faith to life today?
- **Spiritual Needs:** What are the significant spiritual needs of adults at each stage of adulthood? How can faith formation assist

adults in growing in their relationship with God and in living as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily life at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world? How can faith formation deepen adults' practice of the spiritual disciplines and traditions in their daily lives?

- **Ethnic/Cultural Needs:** Who are the ethnic/cultural communities in your church? What are the unique lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of people from each ethnic/cultural community in your church? How can your church offer *culturally-specific* adult faith formation for each ethnic/cultural community in the church, and, when appropriate, in the language of the people? How can faith formation be *inclusive* of the traditions, heritages, and unique gifts of each ethnic/cultural community in your church?

2. Adult faith formation recognizes that learning is a process of active inquiry with initiative residing in the adult learner and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.

A core principle of adult learning is that *learning is an process of active inquiry with initiative residing in the adult learner*. Adults prefer to determine their *own* learning experiences. The traditional model of schooling has conditioned adults to perceive the proper role of learners as being dependent on teachers to make decisions for them as to what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it has been learned. Increasingly today's adult learners are knowledge workers. They are accustomed to searching out what they want to know, when they want and need to know it. People are becoming more and more self-directed in their learning, and they have almost unlimited access to information through the Internet and the wide variety of print and media learning resources available in our society today.

Research studies on adult learning point to motivation as a key factor in determining whether or not adults will participate in an adult faith formation offering. *The key motivation in adult learning is that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.* The research tells us to be aware of a variety of adult

motivations and design learning activities that utilize these motivational factors.

- Adults are motivated to learn when *facing life transitions*. They seek learning and support to cope with changes in their lives that give rise to new developmental tasks, e.g., raising children, aging parents, financial matters, job changes, divorce, etc.
- Adults are motivated to learn when there is a *gap* between their present level of understanding, skill, performance and/or growth and the desired level or goal that they set for themselves or that their organization/community expects of them.
- Adults are motivated by appealing to personal and spiritual growth and/or personal benefits.
- Adults are motivated to learn when they identify they have a need to learn.
- Adults are motivated to learn when the benefits of a learning experience outweigh their resistance.
- Adults are motivated to participate in adult learning programs that are enjoyable and enriching.
- Adults are motivated to learn when they have the opportunity to do something they could not do before.
- Adults are motivated to learn by settings that have a natural, interactive, communal feel. They want to be treated and seated as adults in the physical settings where they gather.
- Adults are motivated to learn when programs are sensitive to their time constraints by keeping commitments short in terms of duration and offering choices of times for participation.

3. Adult faith formation views learning as a lifelong process that involves both formal and informal learning, intentional or unexpected.

Learning is a lifelong process and adult learners need access to a wide variety of learning activities throughout life. We are a society of lifelong learners. Learning in adulthood is now taken as normative. Over the 12 month period from Spring 2004-2005 (the latest year statistics are available), 44 percent of adults in the U.S. reported having participated in **formal** adult educational activities, excluding full-time only enrollments in college/university or

vocational/technical credential programs. The 44 % percent of adults who participated in formal adult educational activities were divided almost equally between work-related courses (27% of all adults in the U.S.) and personal interest courses (21% of all adults in the U.S.).

By most estimates *informal learning* accounts for more than 70% of adult learning taking place today. Informal learning describes a lifelong process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educational influences and resources in his or her environment, from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library, the mass media, and the Internet. Informal learning can be intentional or not. There might be a teacher, but it's probably a colleague or friend. We might read an article or book, visit a website, listen to a podcast, or watch a video online. We might visit Home Depot or Lowe's for a clinic on home repair or gardening or stop by our local bookstore or library for a reading group or special program. On television many channels are devoted to informal learning. The programs of *The Food Network*, while not formal education, promote learning as shows teach people how to cook, try new recipes, etc. The variety of home improvement, such as the "This Old House" on PBS, or the extreme home makeover shows on the TLC and HGTV networks, promote learning, even though they are not formal educational TV programs.

Formal and informal learning can be *intentional*—when an individual aims to learn something and goes about achieving that objective or *unexpected*—when in the course of everyday activities an individual learns something that he or she had not intended or expected.

Applying the four types of learning to adult faith formation, we can visualize the relationship among these four types of learning in the following way.

Formal Learning

classes speaker series workshops online courses small group Bible study	self-study Bible study social media/networking faith-sharing groups
Intentional	Unexpected
reading mentoring service/mission activity program at the library or local bookstore	internet surfing playing watching a movie TV show shopping at a home improvement store

Informal Learning

Most of the adult faith formation efforts in churches are *formal* and *intentional* learning through organized programs. Churches can expand their faith formation efforts by promoting all four types of learning. For example, Sunday worship is *informal* and *intentional* learning. A church can help adults learn from their participation in worship through a weekly journal (online and in print) with reflection questions on the Scripture readings and the sermon. The readings and sermon can also be available in print or audio for further study on the church's website. The journal could also be used in a weekly faith sharing group or in table discussion after Sunday worship. These are all examples of informal and intentional learning activities.

4. Adult faith formation utilizes a variety of learning models to address the diverse life tasks and situations, religious and spiritual needs, and interests of adults; and incorporates both face-to-face, interactive learning activities and virtual, online learning activities.

We know from research that adult learners will chose the learning activity that best fits their learning needs, preferred modes of learning, and time constraints. In order to accomplish this, an adult faith formation needs to provide a variety of content and learning activities, and a variety of program models for learning that include learning activities in physical places and virtual spaces. Five models that should be part of adult faith formation include:

- **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/presentations at universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, regional church programs; through engagement in community/political action, local and global service/justice organizations and projects

Adult faith formation includes learning activities in physical places and virtual spaces, blending face-to-face, interactive learning with virtual, online learning. Online websites, social networking services, and digital technologies (e.g., an iPod Touch, smart cell phones) 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 adult faith formation in a church.

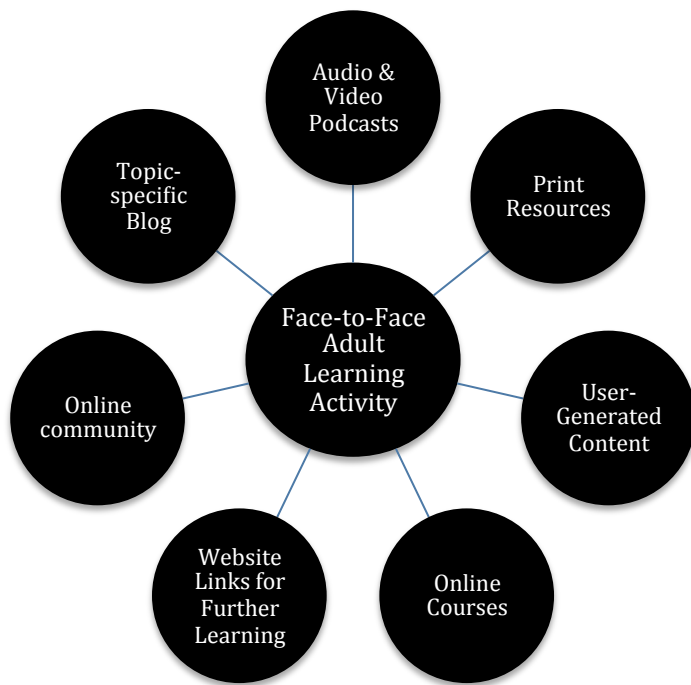
There are two ways to envision the relationship between the physical and virtual. The first approach begins with people's participation in face-to-face learning activities (small group, large group, congregation, community/world) and then uses virtual online spaces (learning activities, print/audio/video, social networking) to extend, deepen, and support the learning that began in the physical program. For example, a church sponsors a three-session program on the Gospel of Luke in

preparation for Cycle C of the upcoming liturgical year. The learning from this short program can be extended and deepened online with 1) weekly commentaries on the Sunday Gospel from Luke, 2) online Bible study program (independent or with a small group) on the Gospel of Luke, 3) a university course on the Gospel of Luke on iTunes U, and 4) an online blog that allows people to post their reflections on each Sunday's reading and invites discussion online.

The second approach begins with people's involvement in online/digital learning activities and leads them to participate in face-to-face learning activities. For example, a church uses its website to develop an online spiritual formation center using a variety of already existing resources: 1) daily fixed hour prayer (liturgy of the hours), 2) weekly and seasonal prayer resources, 3) links to prayer sites around the world (www.sacredspace.ie, www.taize.fr, www.upperroom.org), 4) an online retreat (*A 34 week retreat for Everyday Life* from Creighton University, <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html>), and 5) online courses with spiritual guides like Thomas Merton, Joyce Rupp, Henri Nouwen, Joan Chittister from Spirituality and Practice (www.SpiritualityandPractice.com): 40-day retreats with daily emails containing short readings for reflection, practice suggestions, and access to a private "Practice Circle" where people can share their wisdom and experiences with other e-course participants.

The online spiritual formation center could connect people to church-based learning activities and resources, such as a relationship with a spiritual director, a spiritual formation course (such as the small group program *Companions in Christ* from Upper Room Books), a retreat experience at church or a retreat center, a series of workshops on the spiritual disciplines (e.g., *Lectio Divina*, silence, contemplation, the Examen, meditation, spiritual reading, fixed hour prayer), etc.

These relationships between adult faith formation in physical places and virtual spaces can be visualized in the following way:



One example of this integrated approach to adult faith formation is ***Bible with Brian*** from Ginghamburg Church in Ohio. Brian Brown, the teaching pastor at Ginghamburg, teaches through the entire Bible in a year, including practical application on how to live out God’s truths everyday. Every Tuesday and Wednesday nights, “Bible with Brian” follows the book of the Bible featured in the daily *Transformation Journal* produced by the church. The journal is centered around a weekly topic and provides Bible verses about that topic, wisdom about the day’s study from authors, and questions to help people apply the reading to their daily life. The Bible study begins with a meal from 5:30-6:30 p.m. and then the program from 6:30-8 p.m. or 7-8:30 p.m. Children’s care and activities for birth through grade 5 are available. In addition to the gathered program, the program is available as an MP3 audio file so people can listen to it online or download to their computer or MP3 player. Adults can also subscribe to the podcast on iTunes and listen to current and past episodes. Adults can download the “Bible with Brian” handout and use it to follow along with the audio broadcast of the program. People can also subscribe to the “Bible with Brian Spiritual Vitamins” newsletter—a daily take on the *Transformation Journal* from Brian Brown. (For more information go to <http://ginghamsburg.org/biblewithbrian>.)

A Summary of Key Features

In summary, an Adult Faith Formation Network needs to:

1. Include a variety of content topics and learning activities in order to address addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, spiritual and religious needs, and interests of adults in the church.
2. Guide adults in developing their own personalized learning pathway.
3. Recognizes that the initiative for learning resides in the adult learner.
4. Incorporate four types of learning: formal and informal, intentional and unexpected.
5. Utilize a variety of faith formation models: on your own, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and in the community and world.
6. Provide learning activities in physical spaces (face-to-face) and virtual places (online).

Part 2. Designing an Adult Faith Formation Network for Your Church

The goal of the design process is to guide your church in developing and implementing a plan for an Adult Faith Formation Network for all of the adults in your church (and community), utilizing a wide variety of learning activities and resources.

Task 1. Form an Adult Faith Formation Task Force

Develop an “Adult Faith Formation Task Force” consisting of 1) church staff and faith formation leaders, 2) at least one adult from each of the decades of adulthood (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s+), and 3) church members who are involved in the different forms of adult education in your community. The Task Force is responsible for designing an adult faith formation plan, organizing the implementation logistics, finding leaders and resources for the plan, monitoring progress, and conducting evaluations. The Task Force needs a coordinator/convener who facilitates the work of the Task Force in designing an adult faith formation plan, organizing implementa-

tion logistics, finding leaders and resources to implement the plan, monitoring progress and conducting evaluations, and serving as a liaison between the task force and the church and wider community.

Task 2. Prepare a Statement of Your Church's Vision and Goals for Adult Faith Formation

Work together as a Task Force to prepare a short statement of your church's vision and goals for adult faith formation. Most Christian churches have similar goals for adult faith formation. Churches want faith formation for adults that helps them to grow in their relationship with God, develop a deeper understanding of the Bible and their faith tradition, relate the Christian faith to life today, participate in the life and ministries of the faith community, and live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily life at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world. Churches want faith formation that touches the head, the heart, and actions of adults. They want faith formation that informs, forms, and transforms.

Together as a team review the important documents on the vision and goals for adult faith formation in your denomination. You might want to invite a guest speaker to present a workshop on the goals and vision of adult faith formation or find a video presentation. You can contact your diocese/synod/regional church body for suggestions.

Task 3. Develop an Inventory of Your Church's Current Adult Faith Formation Programming

Develop an inventory of your church's current adult faith formation activities and programs. The inventory is developed around the five basic adult learning models: 1) learning on your own, 2) learning in small groups, 3) learning in large groups, 4) learning in the congregation, and 5) learning in the community and world. Use the format outlined on the worksheet to organize your inventory. After completing the inventory, discuss the state of your church's adult faith formation:

- What are the strengths in your current adult faith formation? What are the weaknesses?
- What is most effective in your current programming? What is not?

- Which of the five adult learning models are being used most effectively? Which are not?
- Who is being served by current adult faith formation programming? Who is not?
- Where are the greatest needs or gaps? What are the priority areas for growth and improvement?

Task 4. Research the Life Issues and Learning Needs of Adults in Your Church

1. Research and Discussion

Discuss the important issues and learning needs of the adults in your church using the following questions. Feel free to adapt these questions and add your own.

- **Life Issues:** What's happening in the lives and world of adults in your church today: family, work, leisure, relationships, sexuality, suffering and grief, social and political issues, community issues, etc.?
- **Life Tasks:** What are the developmental life tasks facing adults in the major life periods: 20s-30s, 40s-50s, 60s-70s, 80s-90s?
- **Milestones and Transitions:** What are the significant milestones/transitions that adults in your church are experiencing, such as geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, empty nests, retirement, unanticipated illness, divorce, loss of loved ones, etc.?
- **Religious Needs:** What are the significant religious learning needs of adults in your church, such as understanding the Bible and relating it to life today, understanding the faith tradition and beliefs and how to live them today, making Christian moral decisions, etc.
- **Spiritual Needs:** What are the significant spiritual needs of adults in your church, such as growing in their relationship with God; living as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily life at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world; spiritual disciplines and traditions; prayer, etc.?
- **Ethnic/Cultural Needs:** What are the unique lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of people from each ethnic/cultural community in your church?

2. Focus Groups

Organize focus groups of 6-12 people in each of the following age groups of adulthood: 1) 20-30, 2) 40-50, 3) 60-75, and 4) 75+. Be sure to select a diversity of adults who reflect the ethnic and socio-economic character of your church, and the various states in life (single, married, divorced, etc.) Use the following questions as the basis of your focus group interviews (see worksheet). Feel free to adapt the questions to your church.

1. How would you describe your age group in key words or phrases?
2. What are some of the key life tasks that your age group is experiencing?
3. What are some of the important life issues that your age group is experiencing today?
4. What are the most meaningful experiences you have in life? What makes these experiences meaningful to you?
5. How important is your relationship with God? Why?
6. Where do you experience God most?
7. What are the significant spiritual issues that your age group is experiencing today?
8. What is most important to you about being a Christian (or your particular faith tradition) today?
9. How do you live your Christian faith? Name some of the ways you put your faith into practice.
10. How can the church help you to continue growing as a Christian? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see your church offer for adults?

3. A Profile of Life Issues and Learning Needs

Based on the results of your research, discussion, and focus group interviews, develop a profile of the life issues and learning needs of adults in your church.

Complete your research by identifying *the most important life issues and learning needs your church's adult faith formation should address in the coming year(s)* for each age group: 1) 20-30, 2) 40-50, 3) 60-75, and 4) 75+.

Task 5. Research Learning Activities, Leaders, and Resources to Address the Important Life Issues and Learning Needs

Today, as never before, a local church has access to an abundance of adult faith formation programming, resources, and networks that can address the diversity of adult learning needs. Resources for learning abound in every environment; a primary task of a learning system is to identify these resources and link learners with them effectively.

Using the list of the most important life issues and learning needs as a guide, research the resources available to your church that will address these needs and eventually become part of your Adult Faith Formation Network (see worksheet). Consider the following categories:

- **People Resources:** Conduct a gifts/talents/skills/knowledge survey of the people resources in your church, the wider community, the diocese/synod/regional church body, colleges and universities, church-related organizations, etc. who can be invited to take a leadership role in the adult faith formation plan. Consider people who teach courses or specialized programs, guest presenters on specialized topics, leaders for small groups and Bible studies, prayer guides/spiritual directors, leaders for service/mission programs, etc.
- **Physical, Face-to-Face Learning Activity Resources:** Identify face-to-face learning activities that you can use to address the priority issues and learning needs. There are a variety of options: 1) programs that your church is already sponsoring, 2) an opportunity that you are not utilizing (e.g., design reflection activities around Sunday worship), 3) a new program that your church can adopt, and 4) a program that you can promote as part of your plan and encourage adult participation. Consider programs in your church, the wider community, the diocese/synod/regional church body, retreat and conference centers, colleges and universities, church-related organizations, etc. Indicate the learning model(s) used in the program: Learning on Your Own, Learning in Small Group, Learning in Large Group, Learning in the Congregation, and/or Learning in the Community and World.
- **Print and Media Learning Activity Resources:** Identify print and media resources from publishers and learning

organizations that you can use to address the priority issues and learning needs. Indicate the learning model(s) used in the resource.

■ **Online Learning Activity Resources:**

Identify online learning activity resources that you can use to address the priority issues and learning needs. Indicate the learning model(s) used in the resource,

After you have completed your research, review your work to determine if there are priority life issues and learning needs for which your church will need to design new programming.

Task 6. Design and Implement Your Adult Faith Formation Network Plan

Use the following process to move from research on learning resources to a final Adult Faith Formation Plan that you can implement. You may find it helpful to review adult faith formation plans from other churches before you begin. Here are four examples:

- Ginghamburg Church (Ohio) (<http://ginghamsburg.org/adult>)
- Willowcreek Church (Illinois) (<http://classes.willowcreek.org>)
- Holy Infant Church (North Carolina) (www.holyinfantchurch.org/faith_development_spirituality)
- The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection (Kansas) (www.cor.org/programs-ministries/thejourney)

1. Timeframe

Decide on the timeframe for your final plan. Will it be a plan for the whole year or will you develop seasonal plans (Fall, Winter-Spring, and Summer)?

2. Development of Integrated Adult Faith Formation Activity Plans

Use the research on learning activities, leaders, and resources, to create Adult Faith Formation Activity Plans that address each of the important life issues and learning needs (see worksheet). Decide which learning activities you will incorporate in your plan. You will also need to determine if there are priority needs for which there are no program resources. The team will

need to design new programs to address these needs.

A Faith Formation Activity Plan addresses a life issue or learning need with learning opportunities and resources using the six faith formation models:

1. faith formation on your own
2. faith formation at home
3. faith formation in small groups
4. faith formation in large groups
5. faith formation in the congregation
6. faith formation in the community/world

A Faith Formation Activity Plan incorporates a variety of options for learning in face-to-face, physical places and in virtual, online spaces.

- **Physical:** church, homes, coffee shop, colleges, service/mission sites, retreat centers, monasteries, theaters, community sites, etc.
- **Online:** audio and video podcasts, print resources, online courses, website links for further learning, online community and social networking, topic-specific blogs, etc.

For example, an Adult Faith Formation Activity Plan for Lent on the church-wide theme of repentance and conversion, could have the following learning activities:

- book of Scripture readings, reflections, and prayers for each day of Lent (print and online)
- all of the sermons/homilies during Lent focus on repentance and conversion and are available online in MP3 files with a personal and small group study guide
- daily Bible reading, reflections, and prayer are emailed to all of the adults in the church and are available online
- a Sunday morning Bible study on the Lenten lectionary readings is offered after Sunday worship service; an online group meets during the week to study and reflect on the readings
- a guest speaker presents a two-evening program on repentance and conversion in the Christian life during the first two weeks of Lent; the program is video-taped and available online in a podcast with a study guide
- a retreat day on the theme of conversion is conducted at the local retreat house the week

prior to Holy Week; for those who cannot attend an online retreat experience is offered

- resources for Lenten study and reflection are available online
- a reconciliation service is offered during the third week of Lent

Each Adult Faith Formation Activity Plan seeks to incorporate a variety of ways to learn: differing levels of depth and commitment, a variety of learning models reflecting the diversity of learning styles, online and face-to-face learning, and times and locations that are convenient for adults. This approach means that adults can have a variety of ways to learn a topic, removing many of the more common obstacles to adult learning in churches.

3. Balance

Review each Adult Formation Activity Plan to make sure you have balance among the five learning models (on your own, small group, large group, in the congregation, in the community/world) and between learning in physical places and in virtual spaces.

4. Leadership

Using the research you conducted into people resources, identify leaders who will be involved in coordinating/conducting/facilitating individual learning activities. Determine which learning activities still need leaders and develop a plan for finding and preparing leaders for their role.

5. Church Website

Consider how you will use your church's website as part of your Adult Faith Formation Plan. For example:

- ✓ provide adult formation programming online for adults
- ✓ provide resources for adults to download
- ✓ connect adults to faith formation programs on other websites
- ✓ network adults engaged in faith formation
- ✓ market/advertise adult formation offerings

6. Program Guide

Create an adult faith formation program guide with your annual or seasonal offerings (your "course catalog" and calendar) in print format and online format (PDF, online calendar, etc.). Develop descriptions for every learning activity, indicating clearly the content or focus of the

program and the particulars, such as date, location, cost, time, website location, etc.

7. Spiritual/Learning Assessment

Create an assessment tool (with a print and online version) that can help adults in your church assess their spiritual growth and identify their needs for learning. The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS has developed a tool to assist adults in their church to assess where they are in their faith journey and their needs of continuing growth and learning.

We invite you to join us on the greatest journey of your life – The Journey of Knowing, Loving and Serving God – as we strive to become a community of deeply committed Christians. We know that sometimes getting started can be daunting, especially in such a large church, but we want to travel this journey with you. Our Adult Discipleship Ministry offers you a navigation system that provides directions, routes and traveling companions to support and encourage you along the way. We believe that nothing in the world will bring you greater joy, greater challenge and greater meaning than the journey into life as God intended us to live it. To help encourage and equip you for your Journey, we've created the Journey assessment tool.

Visit their website to see their adult faith formation offerings and the assessment tool: www.cor.org/programs-ministries/thejourney.

8. Marketing

Develop your marketing plan for adult faith formation. Consult the handout, "Marketing Suggestions" for a process and ideas. United Methodist Communications has an excellent online guide with a process and practical strategies for developing a marketing plan: www.umcom.org/site/c.mrLZJ9PFKMG/b.5160951/k.54F3/Church_Marketing_Plan.htm.

9. Evaluate

Develop an evaluation form for each type of learning activity so that you can receive feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the learning activity (see worksheet for examples). These can be done online or in person. Each season schedule a team meeting to review the past season's offerings, make adjustments and revisions, and plan for the next season.

An Inventory of Current Adult Faith Formation Programming

Use this format to develop an inventory of your adult faith formation programming.

1. Learning on Your Own

- Examples: reading, online courses, audio and video programs, movies, television programs

What are the ways your church promotes and supports Learning on Your Own?

Learning Activity	Participants/Target Group	Resources Used	Delivery System	Date/Timing

2. Learning in Small Groups

- Examples: Bible and theology study groups, social issues study groups, faith sharing groups, lectionary-based groups, service/mission action groups, support groups, special interest groups

What types of small groups does your church offer?

Type of Small Group	Topic/Theme	Participants/Target Group	Resources Used	Date/Timing

3. Learning in Large Groups

- Examples: courses, speaker series, workshops, film festivals, conferences, intergenerational programs

What types of large group learning activities or programs does your church offer?

Learning Activity/Program	Topic/Theme	Participants/Target Group	Resources	Date/Timing

4. Learning in the Congregation

- Examples: Sunday worship, church year events and celebrations, service/mission activities, ministry and leadership in the church and community

How are people helped to learn through their participation in congregational events and ministries?

Church Event or Activity	Date/Timing	Ways People Are Helped to Learn through their Participation

5. Learning in the Community and World

- Examples: programs/courses/clinics/workshops/presentations at universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, regional church programs; through engagement in community/political action, local and global service/justice organizations and projects

How does your church utilize and promote learning opportunities in the community/world? How does your church support people's participation and help them to learning through their participation ?

Learning Activity, Group, or Program	Organization	Ways People Are Helped to Learn through their Participation	Date/Timing

Researching Adult Life Issues and Learning Needs

Together as a team research and discuss the important issues and learning needs of your church's adults.

Life Issues

- What's happening in the lives and world of adults in your church today: family, work, leisure, relationships, sexuality, suffering and grief, social and political issues, etc.?

Life Tasks

- What are the developmental life tasks facing adults in the major life periods: 20s-30s, 40s-50s, 60s-70s, 80s-90s?

Milestones and Transitions

- What significant milestones/transitions are adults in your church experiencing, such as geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, empty nests, retirement, unanticipated illness, divorce, loss of loved ones, etc.?

Religious Needs

- What are the significant religious learning needs of adults in your church, such as understanding the Bible and relating it to today, understanding the faith tradition and beliefs and how to live them today, making Christian moral decisions, etc.

Spiritual Needs

- What are the significant spiritual needs of adults in your church, such as growing in their relationship with God; living as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily life at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world; spiritual disciplines and traditions; prayer, etc.?

Ethnic/Cultural Needs

- What are the unique lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of people from each ethnic/cultural community in your church?

Adult Faith Formation Interviews

Interview Groups

Organize focus groups of 6-12 people in each of the following age groups of adulthood: 1) 20-30, 2) 40-50, 3) 60-75, and 4) 75+. Be sure to select a diversity of adults who reflect the ethnic and socio-economic character of your church, and the various states in life (single, married, divorced, etc.)

Interview Questions

Use the following questions as the basis of your focus group interviews.

- 1. How would you describe your age group in key words or phrases?**
- 2. What are some of the key life tasks that your age group is experiencing?**
- 3. What are some of the important life issues that your age group is experiencing today?**
- 4. What are the most meaningful experiences you have in life? What makes these experiences meaningful to you?**
- 5. How important is your relationship with God? Why?**
- 6. Where do you experience God most?**
- 7. What are the significant spiritual issues that your age group is experiencing today?**
- 8. What is most important to you about being a Christian (or your particular faith tradition) today?**
- 9. How do you live your Christian faith? Name some of the ways you put your faith into practice.**
- 10. How can the church help you to continue growing as a Christian? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see your church offer for adults?**

Profile of Adult Life Issues and Learning Needs

Based on your research, discussion, and focus group interviews, develop a profile of the adults in your church.

	20-30 year olds	40-50 year olds	60-75 year olds	75+ year olds
Life Issues				
Life Tasks				
Milestones and Transitions				
Religious Needs				
Spiritual Needs				
Ethnic/ Cultural Needs				
What they want the church to offer				

Priority Issues and Learning Needs for Adult Faith Formation

Identify the most important life issues and learning needs from your Profile that your church's adult faith formation should address in the coming year(s).

20-30 year olds	40-50 year olds	60-75 year olds	75+ year olds

Researching Learning Resources

Use this format to research and catalog your learning resources.

1. People Resources

- Using your priority issues and learning needs as guide, conduct a gifts/talents/skills/knowledge survey of the people resources in your church, the wider community, the diocese/synod/regional church body, colleges and universities, church-related organizations, etc. who can be invited to take a leadership role in the adult faith formation plan. Consider people who teach courses or specialized programs, guest presenters on specialized topics, leaders for small groups and Bible studies, prayer guides/spiritual directors, leaders for service/mission programs, etc.

Life Issue/Learning Need	Potential Program Leader	Particular Gift/Talent/Skill/Knowledge

2. Face-to-Face Learning Activity Resources

- Identify face-to-face learning activities that you can use to address the priority issues and learning needs. There are a variety of options: 1) programs that your church is already sponsoring, 2) an opportunity that you are not utilizing (e.g., design reflection activities around Sunday worship), 3) a new program that your church can adopt, and 4) a program that you can promote as part of your plan and encourage adult participation. Consider programs in your church, the wider community, the diocese/synod/regional church body, retreat and conference centers, colleges and universities, church-related organizations, etc.
- Indicate the **learning model(s)** used in the program: Learning on Your Own, Learning in Small Group, Learning in Large Group, Learning in the Congregation, and/or Learning in the Community and World.

Life Issue/Learning Need	Learning Program & Sponsor	Learning Models	Location	Date/Timing	Cost

3. Print and Media Learning Activity Resources

- Identify print and media resources from publishers and learning organizations that you can use to address the priority issues and learning needs. Review the **Adult Faith Formation Resource Guides** for assistance.
- Indicate the **learning model(s)** used in the resource: Learning on Your Own, Learning in Small Group, Learning in Large Group, Learning in the Congregation, and/or Learning in the Community and World.

Life Issue/Learning Need	Resource	Producer	Learning Models	Cost

4. Online Learning Activity Resources

- Identify online learning activity resources that you can use to address the priority issues and learning needs. Review the **Adult Faith Formation Resource Guides** for assistance.
- Indicate the **learning model(s)** used in the resource: Learning on Your Own, Learning in Small Group, Learning in Large Group, Learning in the Congregation, and/or Learning in the Community and World.

Life Issue/Learning Need	Website	Learning Activity	Website Address	Cost

Integrated Adult Faith Formation Learning Activity Plans

Create Adult Faith Formation Learning Activity Plans to address each of the important life issues and learning needs. Decide which learning activities you will incorporate in your plan. You will also need to determine if there are priority needs for which there are no program resources. The team will need to design new programs to address these needs.

A Learning Activity Plan addresses a life issue or learning need with learning opportunities and resources using the five learning models:

1. learning on your own
2. learning in small groups
3. learning in large groups
4. learning in the congregation
5. learning in the community/world

A Learning Activity Plan incorporates a variety of ways to learn in face-to-face, physical places and in virtual, online spaces.

- **Physical:** church, homes, coffee shop, colleges, service/mission sites, retreat centers, monasteries, theaters, community sites, etc.
- **Online:** audio and video podcasts, print resources, online courses, website links for further learning, online community and social networking, topic-specific blogs, etc.

Each Adult Faith Formation Learning Activity Plan seeks to incorporate a variety of ways to learn: differing levels of depth and commitment, a variety of learning models reflecting the diversity of learning styles, online and face-to-face learning, and times and locations that are convenient for adults. This approach means that adults can have a variety of ways to learn a topic, removing many of the more common obstacles to adult learning in churches.

Example

Spiritual Formation Learning Activity Plan Focus: Learning Spiritual Disciplines and Practices

On Your Own

- Daily Prayer: www.sacredspace.ie, www.taize.fr, www.upperroom.org, www.loyolapress.com
- Fixed Hour Prayer: www.explorefaith.org/prayer/fixed/hours.php
- Spiritual Guides: a list of individuals available for 1-1 spiritual mentoring
- Spiritual Reading: a list of recommended books on the church website
- Online Retreat: *A 34 week retreat for Everyday Life* from Creighton University, <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html>
- Weekly and Seasonal Prayer Resources: online and in booklets
- Online Spirituality Course: 40-day retreats with spiritual guides like Thomas Merton, Joyce Rupp, Henri Nouwen, and Joan Chittister from Spirituality and Practice, www.SpiritualityandPractice.com

In Small Groups

- Spiritual Formation Course: *Companions in Christ: A Small-Group Experience in Spiritual Formation*, Upper Room Books, www.companionsinchrist.org

In Large Groups

- Intergenerational Learning Programs on Prayer: monthly sessions for all ages on prayer practices
- Retreat Experience: at church or a retreat center
- Workshop Series on the Spiritual Disciplines: Lectio Divina, silence, contemplation, the Examen, meditation, spiritual reading, fixed hour prayer
- Monastery Trip: experiencing monastic life

In the Congregation

- Prayer Room: with resources about prayer and spiritual practices
- Advent and Lent Prayer Services

Learning Activities for Adult Faith Formation

Learning on Your Own

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Bible Reading
- ✓ Devotions
- ✓ Prayer and Spiritual Practices/Disciplines
- ✓ Online Theology and Bible Courses
- ✓ Online Spirituality Courses
- ✓ Online Spiritual Formation
- ✓ Online Retreats
- ✓ Spiritual Direction
- ✓ Milestones/Life Transitions Resources and Support
- ✓ Mentoring and Apprenticeship
- ✓ Audio Podcasts
- ✓ Video Podcasts
- ✓ Feature Films
- ✓ Television Programs

Learning in Small Groups

- ✓ Book Clubs
- ✓ Bible Study Groups
- ✓ Lectionary-Based Small Groups
- ✓ Prayer Groups
- ✓ Theology Study Groups
- ✓ Social Issues Study-Action Groups (e.g., *JustFaith*, *JustSkills*, *JustMatters*, and *Engaging Spirituality*: www.justfaith.org)
- ✓ Discipleship and Faith Sharing Groups
- ✓ Christian Practices Small Groups
- ✓ *Living Your Strengths* Small Group Program (book, DVD, and leader's kit)
- ✓ Service/Mission Action Groups
- ✓ Kindred Groups (mom's groups, men and women groups, parents groups)
- ✓ Recovery Groups (divorce, addition, depression)
- ✓ Special Interest Groups
- ✓ Movie Discussion Group
- ✓ Career Transitions Group (exploring a new career or seeking a new career direction)
- ✓ Life Transitions Groups (family changes, retirement, loss of loved ones)

Learning in Large Groups

- ✓ Theological Topics Courses
- ✓ Bible Courses
- ✓ Introduction to Christian Faith Courses (e.g., Alpha course: www.alphausa.org)

- ✓ Life Issues Courses
- ✓ Parenting Classes and Workshops
- ✓ Intergenerational Programs
- ✓ Speaker Series
- ✓ Single-Session Programs
- ✓ Workshops
- ✓ Round Table Discussions
- ✓ Field Trips (museums, monastery, theater, concert)
- ✓ Faith and Film Festivals
- ✓ Retreats
- ✓ Conferences
- ✓ Faith and Music Concert
- ✓ Financial Planning Course (e.g., Financial Peace University by Dave Ramsey: www.daveramsey.com and Crown Financial Study: www.crown.org)
- ✓ Milestones Faith Formation: 1) preparation for a milestone, 2) church celebration, and 3) continued learning, resources, and support

Learning in the Congregation

- ✓ Sunday worship (lectionary and sermon study)
- ✓ Church year seasons and events (Advent, Lent, Holy Week, etc.)
- ✓ Service/Mission Projects
- ✓ Ministry and Leadership
- ✓ Milestone and Life Transition Celebrations

Learning in the Community and World

- ✓ College/University/Seminary Programs (programs, courses, clinics, workshops, lecture series)
- ✓ Retreat Center Programs
- ✓ Monastery Programs/Experiences
- ✓ YMCA/YWCA
- ✓ Library Programs
- ✓ Bookstore Programs and Reading Groups
- ✓ Regional Church Programs
- ✓ Community Social/Political Action
- ✓ Local and Global Service and Action for Justice (organizations and projects)
- ✓ Community Lunch and Learn (community leaders speaking about key issues in the community)

Adult Faith Formation Learning Activity Plan Worksheet

Use this worksheet for each life issue or learning need that you will include in your Adult Faith Formation Plan.

Life Issue or Learning Need: _____

Target Participants: _____

Learning Activities

Learning Model <small>List each activity.</small>	Learning Resources <small>List resources to be used.</small>	Leaders <small>List leaders involved.</small>	Date Timing
Learning on Your Own			
Learning at Home			
Learning in Small Groups			
Learning in Large Groups			
Learning in the Congregation			
Learning in the Community and World			

Marketing Suggestions

Creating Your Message

Here are five things to remember as you develop your marketing plan. You may need to develop several “messages” for each target audience (20s-30s, 40-50s, 60s-70s, and 75+). Be sure to pay careful attention to the titles of your programs so that they capture people’s interests. Develop descriptions that are positive in tone, indicate clearly the content or focus of the program, and include the particulars (date, location, cost, and time).

1. **Find the inherent drama within your offering:** What’s interesting in your program offerings? How does it respond to something within the lives of people? Connect the program offerings to the real needs of adults.
2. **Translate that inherent drama into a meaningful benefit:** What are the major benefits in participating in adult faith formation? Why should people respond? The benefit should come directly from the inherently dramatic feature. And even though you have four or five benefits, stick with one or two—three at most.
3. **Get people’s attention:** How will you interest people in adult faith formation? People do not pay attention to advertising. They pay attention only to things that interest them. So you’ve just got to interest them.
4. **Motivate your audience to do something:** What do you want people to do once you’ve introduced the adult faith formation offerings? You must tell people exactly what you want them to do. Tell them to go online a register for a program, complete an interest finder, send in a registration form, call someone, etc.
5. **Be sure you are communicating clearly:** Do adults understand what you’re talking about? Make sure you are putting your message across. Show your promotion or booklet or advertising to ten people and ask them what the main point is. If one person misunderstands, that means 10 percent of the audience will misunderstand. Make revisions so your message is clear.

- United Methodist Communications has a great online resource for developing a marketing plan. Go to www.umcom.org/site/c.mrLZJ9PFKMG/b.5160951/k.54F3/Church_Marketing_Plan.htm.

Developing Your Marketing Strategies

1. Create a seasonal or annual adult faith formation program booklet in various formats: print, online in PDF, online calendar, etc.
2. Use your church’s website to post regular announcements, new program offerings, calendar, etc.
3. Establish a Facebook site for your church’s adult faith formation and include a calendar of events with descriptions, locations, times, a link to your church’s website, current news, stories from adults who are participating in learning activities, etc.
4. Send email invitations to adults in the church community. Target your message to particular groups or ages.
5. Send personalized and targeted invitations by mail to people with a letter, program booklet, registration form, etc.
6. Have the pastor share the importance and benefits of adult faith formation and the church’s program offerings at Sunday worship.
7. Use orientation or information sessions to describe the benefits of adult faith formation and introduce each new season of adult faith formation programming (e.g., coffee and donuts after Sunday worship).
8. Promote program offerings in the community: coffee shops, YMCA/YWCA, gyms, bookstores, theaters, etc.
9. Include information about adult faith formation offerings in new member packets. Send a personalized invitation to new members with the program booklet.
10. Send a personalized invitation and program booklet to newly married couples, parents who are having their children baptized, adults who have been fully initiated into the church (RCIA), et al.
11. Develop a introductory brochure on adult faith formation, the types of programs offered, and how to get more information and register for programs on the church’s website.

Sample Questions for Evaluating an Adult Learning Activity

Here are a variety of evaluation questions that you can use to construct your own evaluation forms. Be sure to adapt the questions depending the model of learning used and if the learning is in a physical place or online space.

1. What is your overall feeling after participating in this program/learning activity? (Circle all that apply.)
 Enthused Astounded Satisfied Indifferent Ambivalent Encouraged Uneasy Threatened
 Discouraged Affirmed Challenged Enriched
2. This program/learning activity was... very helpful somewhat helpful not very helpful not at all helpful
3. I was pleased by/with... I was disappointed by/with...
4. One thing I found most helpful during this program/learning activity...
5. One of the biggest benefits from participating in the program/learning activity...
6. One way I can use what I learned in my life...
7. I need to know more about...
8. I'm excited by... I'm challenged by...
9. What knowledge or practices have you learned that you did not know before the program/learning activity?
10. How do you feel about the amount of presentation/activities/discussion in this program/learning activity?
 Too much presentation Too much discussion Too many activities Good mixture
11. Circle the number that best represents your evaluation of the program/learning activity.
 (1=strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree)
 - I feel that I will be able to use what I learned. 1 2 3 4
 - The program was presented in an interesting manner. 1 2 3 4
 - The program covered the promised objectives. 1 2 3 4
 - The presenter encouraged participation, questions, and practical application. 1 2 3 4
 - The schedule and length of the program was appropriate. 1 2 3 4
 - The program utilized my experience effectively as a resource for learning. 1 2 3 4
 - The program environment was characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences. 1 2 3 4
 - The program respected my learning style. 1 2 3 4
 - The program offered a variety of learning activities and a variety of ways to learn. 1 2 3 4
 - The program helped me apply my learning to daily life, so that I could see the results and rewards of the learning experience. 1 2 3 4
12. Please rate the environment or physical facilities...
 Fine Good Okay Poor
13. Please rate the scheduling (time, day, month) of the program/learning activity...
 Fine Good Okay Poor
14. How did you find out about the program/learning activity?
15. Why did you decide to participate in this program/learning activity?
16. What are two or three suggestion for improving this program/learning activity...

Create a Learning Journal for an Adult Learning Activity

Create a learning journal for a program/learning activity that includes the following information:

To reflect on what you have learned, identify the insights you have gained and the potential application to your life.

- *Insights (What I've Learned)*
- *Applications (How I'll Use What I've Learned)*
- *Questions (What I Need to Learn or Explore Further)*