

Designing Missional Outreach

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

Websites

1. www.LifelongFaith.com
2. www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com
3. <http://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com>
4. www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com

Missional Faith Formation

The mission curriculum includes two types of “content.” The first involves expanding and extending the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live – engaging with people around their life situation (needs, interests, concerns), their quest for meaning and purpose in life, their drive to make a difference in world and in lives of others, and more. This first type of missional curriculum provides a safe environment for people to explore life-centered and spiritual-centered activities.

The second type of curriculum content 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. Missional faith formation guides people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment. The catechumenal process 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* covers the basics of Christianity in a multi-session course in a supportive small group environment.

Target Spiritual and Religious Diversity

Faith formation needs to be *targeted* and *tailored* to the unique religious and spiritual profiles of people. One way to view the diverse types of adult religiosity and faith practices is to place them on a continuum from adults with a vibrant faith and actively engaged to adults who are spiritual but not religious to those who unaffiliated and uninterested. (For more information see Chapter One in *Faith Formation 2020* by John Roberto, LifelongFaith, 2010)

Vibrant Faith Active Engagement	Occasional but Uncommitted	Spiritual but Not Religious	Unaffiliated & Uninterested
------------------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------------

Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement. The first type describes adults who are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. These adults 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.

Participating Occasionally, but Uncommitted. The second type describes adults who 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. While receptive to an established church, these adults 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 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.

Spiritual, but Not Religious. The third type describes adults who 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 young adults. Congregations are challenged to become more missional – reaching people where their live (physical and online communities), building relationships, engaging in spiritual conversations, and offering programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth.

Unaffiliated and Uninterested. The fourth type describes adults who 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 young adults. 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. Congregations need to develop strategies and approaches for moving faith formation from the church campus into the world.

Barna Research asked the unchurched to rate how much influence thirty different approaches had on their interest in attending a church. The three approaches that seemed to have the most positive effect on the potential for returning to church were: 1) developing relationships (an invitation from a trusted friend), 2) an appealing event – such as a concert or seminar – hosted at the church, and 3) reputational appeal as reflected in ministries that serve the poor and providing mentoring and development for young people. Two additional ideas had moderate appeal: participating in a house church rather than conventional church ministry; and participating in a gathering of people from their same age group and general lifestyle.

Missional Outreach Strategies

1. Developing 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. Creating a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page (and other social media) to connect with people.
3. Connecting with people’s life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
4. Connecting with people during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, and more.
5. Developing 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
6. Organizing 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.
7. Sponsoring community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips that are open to everyone so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.
8. Creating digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars that are offered online.

Establishing Third-Place settings in the community that offer hospitality, build relationships, host spiritual conversations, provide programs and activities, and nourish the spiritual life of people is a great way to make contact with those not engaged in the church community.