

Workshop #1. Center for Congregations Vision & Strategies for 21st Century Faith Formation

John Roberto (jroberto@lifelongfaith.com)

Websites

1. www.LifelongFaith.com
2. www.21stCenturyFaithFormation.com
3. www.IntergenerationalFaith.com
4. www.CuratingFaithFormation.com
5. www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com
6. <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>
7. <http://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com>
8. www.FaithFormationLearningExchange.net
9. <http://vibrantfaithathome.org>

1. Four Big Challenges in the 21st Century

1. **Diversity:** the increasing diversity throughout American society in the length of the lifespan, in generational identities, in family structures and marriage patterns, and in ethnic makeup
2. **Digital Technology:** the rise of new digital technologies that are reshaping society, and the emergence of a connected, networked society
3. **Religiosity:** the dramatic changes and increasing diversity in the religious beliefs, practices, and affiliation of Americans
4. **Religious Transmission:** the decline in religious transmission from generation to generation

2. Spiritual and Religious Diversity

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

Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement. The first type describes people who are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. They have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that engages people – mind, body, heart, and spirit – in a diversity of ways to grow in faith for a lifetime, and live their faith in the world.

Participating Occasionally, but Uncommitted. The second type describes people 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 people 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 people 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 people 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.

3. Making Disciples and Forming Faith in the 21st Century

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

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

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

(See *Will There Be Faith: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*. Thomas Groome, HarperOne, 2011, pages 111-119).

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

- grow in their relationship with God throughout their lives
- live as disciples of Jesus Christ at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world

- make the Christian faith a way life
- develop an understanding of the Bible and their particular faith tradition
- deepen their spiritual life and practices
- engage in service and mission to the world
- live with moral integrity guided by Christian values and ethics
- relate the Christian faith to life today
- participate in the life and ministries of their faith community

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.

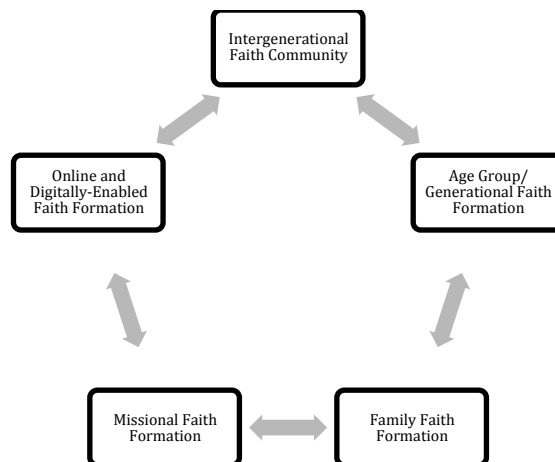
4. A New Faith Forming Ecosystem

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 Faith Community & Faith Formation

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” (Holly Allen and Christine Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, page 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.

Central to 21st 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.

Age Group and Generational Faith Formation

Age group and generational faith formation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of age groups and generations across the whole lifespan. The eight faith forming processes are the framework for an age-specific or generationally-specific curriculum, which also includes life issues appropriate to that stage of life and missional initiatives to engage the spiritual but

not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested. Age group and generation faith formation needs to be connected to the events of church life and to family life.

In the 21st century a faith formation curriculum needs to be seen as *a lifelong journey of discipleship – a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his Way in today’s world*. If we imagine a faith formation curriculum as a lifelong journey of growing in faith and discipleship, then we can think of curriculum as the subject matter and processes that engage people in learning, experiencing, and practicing the Christian faith along this journey.

The new faith forming ecosystem integrates age group and intergenerational faith formation. Intergenerational faith formation provides whole-community experiences and learning, focused on the central events of church life and the Christian faith, and age group and generational faith formation address the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of age groups and generations across the whole lifespan.

A faith formation curriculum for the 21st century needs to be:

1. *Holistic*: envisioning Christian faith as a way of the head, the heart, and the hands – informing, forming, and transforming people in Christian faith and identity.
2. *Comprehensive and Balanced*: developed around the eight primary faith forming processes that facilitate faith growth and incorporate essential knowledge and practices of the Christian faith: caring relationships, celebrating liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life, praying and spiritual formation, reading the Bible, serving people in need and working for justice and caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.
3. *Contextual*: addressing the needs, hungers, interests, and concerns of people today, and their unique spiritual and faith journeys by embracing an approach that moves from *life to Faith to life*.
4. *Digitally-Enabled*: complementing the gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation.
5. *Connected*: linking church life, age groups/generations, daily/home life, and online life through continuous faith formation – connecting participation in church life and events with daily/home life by using online content and connections or reaching people at home and in daily life with online faith formation content and experiences that connect to church life and events.
6. *Multi-platform*: delivered and conducted in multiple settings – self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community and world; and in physical and online learning environments.

Family Faith Formation at Home

The family is the single most important influence on religious transmission and faith practice – a truth demonstrated in research studies, the Christian tradition, and pastoral experience. The faith of parents and grandparents, their role modeling, their teaching, their warm and affirming parenting style are key factors in religious transmission and developing highly religious children, youth, and young adults. In the new faith forming ecosystem, congregations need to equip families as centers of faith formation developed around three essential elements.

Congregations equip families to become centers of learning and faith growth at home by nurturing family faith and developing the faith life of parents and grandparents, strengthening family life by focusing on family asset-building, and developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents (and grandparents) for parenting. There are five elements in a family faith formation curriculum for the home:

1. **Nurturing family faith at home** by utilizing the eight faith forming processes as the primary content – knowledge, experiences, practices, and resources – developed from events of church life, as well as specially designed family resources.

We can nurture family and parent faith through their participation in church life and family/intergenerational program that immerses them in the Christian tradition, Christian practices, and Christian way of life. Intergenerational participation creates a shared experienced of families developing caring relationships, learning together, sharing faith, praying together, serving, and celebrating rituals and traditions, and helps to develop the faith of parents and grandparents – increasing their confidence and competence for engaging in faith practices at home.

We can nurture family faith through a variety activities and resources developed around eight essential faith-forming processes – *caring relationships, celebrating liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition, praying and spiritual formation, reading the Bible, serving people in need and working for justice, and worshipping God*. With the abundance of high quality digital faith formation content and activities, we can now reach families in the context of their daily lives – anytime and anywhere – through their mobile devices.

2. **Building strong families** by developing family assets:

- a) *nurturing relationships* (positive communication, affection, emotional openness, encouragement for pursuing talents and interests)
- b) *establishing routines* (family meals, shared activities, meaningful traditions – holidays, rituals, celebrations, dependability)
- c) *maintaining expectations* (openness about tough topics, fair rules, defined boundaries, clear expectations, contributions to family)
- d) *adapting to challenges* (management of daily commitments, adaptability problem-solving, democratic decision-making)
- e) *connecting to the community* (neighborhood cohesion, relationship with others in the community, participating in enriching activities, supportive resources in the community).
(*The American Family Asset Study*, Search Institute)

3. **Parent faith formation** through participation in intergenerational faith formation at church and church life, and through targeted programs of theological and biblical formation for parents and grandparents.

We can nurture parental faith and develop their faith forming skills through targeted programs of theological and biblical formation at church and online, and by providing training that teaches how to parent for faith growth and be a role model for children – all offered in a variety of learning formats to make it easy to access the programs and content.

4. **Parenting for faith growth training** to equip parents with knowledge, skills, and resources to develop the faith life of their children and practice faith at home as a family.
5. **Parenting education** that develops the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents (and grandparents) for parenting children and teens, with a special focus on parent practices such as love and affection, stress management, relationship skills, respect, promoting and modeling learning, life skills, behavior management, healthy lifestyle, supporting spiritual and religious development and practice, and protection and safety.

We can provide programs (gathered and online), a variety of digital resources, and support to help parents develop effective parenting and child-rearing practices that are conducive to building strong

families and promoting faith transmission— offered in a variety of learning formats to make it easy for parents and grandparents to participate.

Missional Faith Formation

The new faith forming ecosystem incorporates a *missional* emphasis by focusing on the spiritual and religious needs of the “unchurched” and “de-churched” – those who are spiritual but not religious or unaffiliated and uninterested in religion.

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

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

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.

Second, missional faith formation *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 provides one example of a pathway with its ritual stages and formational content – participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation,

development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. Programs like *The Alpha Course* cover the basics of Christianity in a multi-session course in a supportive small group environment. These types of programs and processes provide pathways for people to grow toward a life of discipleship and lifelong faith.

Online & Digitally-Enabled Faith Formation

Digital media and the online environment provide the means to connect church life, age groups/generations, and daily/home life through continuous faith formation – connecting participation in church life and events with daily/home life by using online content and connections or reaching people at home and in daily life with online faith formation content and experiences that connect to church life and events.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum

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

1. Extend and deepen people’s experience and participation in church events and programs with online content for daily and home life. Consider the possibilities for extending Sunday worship, church year feasts and seasons, intergenerational and family programs, classes, youth meetings, mission trips, retreat experiences, vacation Bible school, and more.
2. Provide a complete faith formation experience online connected to the life of the church, e.g., forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events at church with online content for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life. For example:

Church Life Events

Ash Wednesday
 Lent Sunday liturgies
 Stations of the Cross
 Lent prayer
 Lent retreat
 Lent service
 Lent soup suppers

Daily and Home Life Activities

Fasting activities
 Praying activities
 Service/Almsgiving activities
 Lectionary reflections
 Lent study resources and videos
 Lent devotions
 Daily Bible readings

3. “Flip the classroom or program” by creating a digital platform to provide the content that people would learn in the gathered setting in an online learning space using print, audio, video, and more. And then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration. One example is redesigning children’s faith formation so that children and their parents are learning online at home and doing activities together, and then refocusing “class time” to engage children in creating projects and activities that demonstrate their learning. Another example is designing a high school confirmation program that provides the content that used to be taught in the weekly sessions in an online platform for individual learning –

watching videos, reading short materials, and writing a reflection journals; engages the young people in small groups during the month to discuss their online learning; and then meets monthly in a large group gathered session for discussion, interactive activities, and application of the content to living as a Christian today. During the year retreats, worship, and service projects offer additional gathered sessions.

4. Offer opportunities for individuals, families, and small groups to utilize the digital platform as their primary learning setting and provide opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings or in a web conference format, such as a Google+ Hangout. One example is offering six, one-hour parent webinar programs delivered to parents at home in four-month semesters: three webinars followed by a parent gathering at church; three more webinars and concluding with a parent gathering at church. Another example is developing an online Bible study where groups can meet regularly in a physical setting or virtually through Skype or a Google+ Hangout for sharing their learning.
5. Provide high quality and easily accessible online religious content – courses, activities, print and e-books, audio and video programs, and content-rich websites – on the faith formation website or with links to select websites. One example is offering adults a variety of online Bible and theology courses for individual study using online courses from colleges, and seminaries, video programs on YouTube, online programs and webinars from religious publishers and organizations. Another example is providing an online prayer and spirituality center where people can access daily prayer reflections and devotions, offer prayer intentions, pray for others, learn about spiritual practices, download prayer activities for the home, and more.

5. Multiple Environments for Ministry and Faith Formation

Faith formation incorporates seven learning environments, in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. The seven environments provide a way to offer a diversity of programs in different learning environment, as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments – all of which provides people with more options to participate in faith formation and broadens the scope of faith formation offerings. The seven environments include: independent (on your own/self-directed), with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and in the community and world. A variety of learning methods can be used with each of these seven learning environments. Creating this variety of learning environments is aided by the development of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the faith formation offerings.

1. **Independent (on your own, self-directed)** programming provides maximum flexibility for the person – when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning for busy people. Congregations can serve as guide to helping people find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs, and then deliver that programming online at the church’s faith formation website.
2. **Mentoring** provides a one-to-one relationship for faith formation that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or for those who want to explore Jesus and Christianity after leaving church

earlier in life. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring older adults on the use of digital tools and media.

3. **At Home** programming provides individuals and whole families with faith formation programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life, and delivered through a faith formation website. This can include a wide variety of digital media and online programs and resources, such as online learning programs, resources for the church year seasons, Sunday worship resources, online communities and support groups, and links to online faith formation resources and resource centers.
4. **Small Group** programming provides an excellent way to address the diversity of needs by organizing a variety of small groups with each one targeted to a particular need or topic. Small groups also provide lots of flexibility in schedule and location. Groups can meet at times and places that best fit their lives, such as group that meets for breakfast weekly at the local restaurant or for coffee at a local coffee shop. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the congregation to sponsor small group programs. Congregational leaders can provide resources, support, and training for leaders, thereby enabling people to organize their own small groups. Small group programming learning can take many different forms including:
 - Discipleship or faith sharing groups or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological formation study groups, theme or issue oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith sharing groups, book study groups
 - Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups and service/faith in action groups
 - Support groups such as parent groups, caregiving groups, life transition groups
 - Ministry groups involved in leadership in the church and world

Study-action small groups combine study with an experiential hands-on action project . One type of study-action model focuses on engaging people in the ministry of justice and service, weaving together study, small group learning, retreat experiences, and action projects. (The programs from JustFaith Ministries: <http://justfaith.org> are a good example of this .) A second type of study-action model involves ministry or leadership groups that prepare for their particular ministry or leadership role through study accompanied by actual involvement in their ministry or leadership role. This type of learning involves a continuous cycle of study-action-study-action, as the involvement in action generates new learning needs.

5. **Large Group** programming provides a way to serve a large number of people on topics that appeal to a wide audience. Here is a sampling of large group programming:
 - Multi-session programs, such as multi-week courses on theological themes, books of the Bible, parenting at particular stages of family life, life issues)
 - One-session program, such as a monthly session on a theological topic
 - Speaker series, such as a multi-evening or multi-week program focused around a particular theological themes, Christian practices, current events, or the season of the church year
 - Roundtable discussions after Sunday worship, such as exploring the Sunday Scripture readings in age groups or intergenerational groups with refreshments
 - Parent parallel learning program at the same time as their children's program
 - Workshops, such as one day programs targeted to specific life issues – parenting, mid-life issues, aging, and more
 - Film festivals that explore key themes such as relationships, social issues, and meaning in life, and then explore faith themes in the films

- Field trips, such as visiting an art museum or attending a musical or theatrical performance and then exploring faith themes in art or music or drama
 - Retreat experiences in an evening, one-day, or weekend format at church or at a retreat center
 - Intergenerational programs for all ages in the congregation
6. **Congregational** programming focuses on the events already present in the life of the church: Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, sacramental and ritual celebrations, works of justice and acts of service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. Faith formation can provide experiences for people 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. Congregational programming includes leadership and ministry in the congregation and to the world – providing the opportunity for faith formation to prepare people for leadership and ministry, and to reflect upon their engagement.
7. **Community and World** programming provides a way for congregations to utilize existing programs and activities outside the church as part of a faith formation plan. This involves researching the resources and programs being offered locally in the community (programs, courses, clinics, workshops, presentations, and more) at community colleges and universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, and more; and nationally/ globally through national organizations, religious organizations, online resource centers, and more. This is an important environment for developing initiatives for serving, working for justice, and caring for creation. Many organizations – locally, nationally, and globally – have already created programs that be adopted by the congregation.

Congregational Assessment Tool

Part 1. The Congregation Creates a Faith Forming Culture

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

Part 2. The Congregation Equips Parents and Families

14. **Parental Faith:** The congregation helps parents and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship, and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.
15. **Parenting for Faith Growth:** The congregation teaches parents and grandparents the knowledge and skills for forming faith at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible.
16. **Parenting:** The congregation equips parent and grandparents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting today, and how to develop a close, warm, and affirming parenting style that promotes religious transmission at home.
17. **Family Faith Experiences:** The congregation provides whole family experiences that promote growth in faith and discipleship, and teach parents how to share faith and live faith practices at home.
18. **Family Faith Practices:** The congregation provides families with resources to nurture growth in Christian faith and practice at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible
19. **Family Assets:** The congregation strengthens family life by developing the assets that build strong families: nurturing family relationships, establishing family shared activities and traditions, maintaining family expectations and rules, adapting to daily challenges, and connecting to the community.

20. **Digital Ministry with Families:** The congregation connects with families at home through an online ministry (family website, social media) that provides social interaction and a variety of content (print, audio, video, websites) for family faith practices, parent faith formation, parenting, and family asset development.

Part 3. The Congregation Embraces Lifelong Faith Growth & Practice

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

Part 4. The Congregation Has Faithful, Competent Leadership

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