



Envisioning the Future of Faith Formation

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Introducing the Faith Formation 2020 Vision & Strategy

The Faith Formation 2020 Initiative was created to guide churches to envision and design dynamic, engaging and inspiring faith formation in second decade of the 21st century—to imagine the possibilities for faith formation in 2020. The last two decades have seen dramatic political, economic, social, and cultural changes affecting virtually every dimension of American Christianity. Churches across the United States are facing significant challenges in their efforts to provide vibrant faith formation for all ages and generations in the faith community. The new environment in which Christian faith formation will operate in the decade from 2010-2020 will demand new thinking and new models, practices, resources, and technologies to address the spiritual needs of all generations.

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

The goal of the Faith Formation 2020 Initiative is to inspire creative action in the present through anticipation of possible futures. The four scenarios developed through the Initiative are stories that address significant forces affecting faith formation and stimulate new ways of thinking about the present and the future. No one knows what lies just beyond the horizon but these four scenarios of the future can inform church leaders of potential challenges and opportunities they may want to prepare for now rather than react to later. The four scenarios are not predictions, projections, or prophecies, but rather an attempt to provoke a realization that the future need not simply be more of the same.

1. Eight Significant Driving Forces Influencing Faith Formation 2020

What are the driving forces that will most directly impact the future of faith formation in Christian churches by 2020, and more specifically, the ability of congregations to provide vibrant faith formation over the next 10 years? We cannot know what the future will hold beforehand. But we can see trends in the present, which, continuing on their current course, will have an impact on developing faith formation for 2020.

We know that Christian churches are confronted by a number of significant social, cultural, technological, and generational forces that make faith formation for all ages and generations quite challenging. There are driving forces that we can be reasonably certain will shape the worlds we are describing. These “predetermined elements” include the growing influence of Hispanic/Latino religious faith upon American Christianity, the rise of a new stage of adulthood—emerging adulthood, increasing numbers of adults 65 and older in American society, and increasing social, religious, and ethnic/cultural diversity in the U.S. For

example, it is a demographic certainty, that there will be more adults over 65 years old in the U.S. population, and in churches, over the next ten years.

Predetermined elements are important to any scenario story, but they are not the foundation on which these stories are built. Rather, scenarios are formed around “critical uncertainties”—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our focusing issue, the future of faith formation in Christian churches, and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution. Whereas predetermined elements are predictable driving forces, uncertainties are by their nature unpredictable: their outcome can be guessed at but not known. While any single uncertainty could challenge our thinking, the future will be shaped by multiple forces playing out over time. The scenario framework provides a structured way to consider how these critical uncertainties might unfold and evolve in combination.

By reviewing research studies, analyzing trends, and consulting with leaders, the Faith Formation 2020 Initiative selected eight significant forces—critical uncertainties whose future direction is now known, but are already having a significant impact on faith formation today and it appears will continue to do so over the next decade. These eight trends may continue on their present course or change direction, but, in either case, it appears that they will have a significant impact on the future direction of faith formation through 2020. The eight significant forces include:

- **Declining Number of Christians and Growing Number of People with No Religious Affiliation.** The U. S. population continues to show signs of becoming less religious: In 2008, 15-16% of Americans claimed no religious affiliation, nearly double the 1990 figure. Among Americans ages 18-29, one-in-four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion. The number of American adults identified as Christians dropped 10% from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008. Similar to the general American public, Latinos have become less identified with Christianity—down from 91% in 1990 to 82% in 2008. No religious affiliation increased fourfold among Latinos from 900,000 or 6% in 1990 to nearly 4 million or 12% in 2008. It appears that the challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion. This growing non-religious minority reduces the traditional societal role of congregations in family celebrations of life-cycle events. Forestalling of religious rites of passage, such as marriage and baptism, and the lowering expectations on religious funeral services, could have long lasting consequences for religious institutions.
- **Increasing Number of People Becoming More “Spiritual” and Less “Religious.”** A small but growing minority of the U.S. population describe themselves as spiritual but not religious (meaning not connected to organized religion): 9% of Americans were spiritual but not religious in 1998, rising to 14% in 2008; and 18% of 18-39 year olds say they are “spiritual but not religious,” compared to only 11% a decade ago. If what people mean when they say they are spiritual but not religious is that they are generally concerned with spiritual matters but are not interested in organized religion, then this trend indicates a growing minority of the population whose spiritual inclinations do not lead them to become involved in churches, synagogues, or mosques. In our increasingly pluralistic society, to be “spiritual” is more likely to represent an eclectic spirituality, drawing not only from the various streams of Christianity, but including elements of other religious traditions.
- **Declining Participation in Christian Churches.** By all measures of participation, the trends point toward declining participation in church life in mainline Protestant and Catholic churches, including worship attendance, marriages and baptisms in the church, and children and youth participation in faith formation programming. Among young Hispanics, immigrants attend church services more regularly than do the native born (second and third generation). Combined with the trend toward fewer Christians and the growing numbers of religiously

unaffiliated, it appears that succeeding generations of Christians are less likely to be exposed to formation in the Christian faith because worship attendance is down, and therefore participation in church life, education, and activities is down. This means less exposure to the Christian tradition and teachings, reduced opportunities to experience the Christian way of life, and far less reinforcement of the Christian faith in church settings. The effect of these trends can be found in research on emerging adults (20-30 year olds): only 15% embrace a strong religious faith and another 30% believe and perform certain aspects of their religious traditions; at least 40% have no connection to a religious tradition (see *Souls in Transition*).

- **Increasing Diversity and Pluralism in U.S. Society.** U.S. society reflects a growing diversity of ethnic cultures and nationalities and their traditions, customs, foods, and languages, and also a growing diversity of religious traditions from the East and the West. Pluralism creates both richness and tensions. We live next door to other nations; we're engaged in conversation with people from all parts of the world, with customs and expectations vastly different from our own. We also live in a pluralistic society in which no single authority exercises supremacy and no single belief or ideology dominates. Christian culture is no longer at the center of American life; it has been replaced by a tapestry of religious and spiritual alternatives and choices. The range of religious practice and belief in U.S. society today is enormous, and it is all around us. The increasing diversity and the pluralism of belief and practice undermines the plausibility and truth-claims of any single religious tradition. The diversity of religious choice and openness to everything religious results in people crisscrossing religious boundaries as they construct their own personal spiritualities. We have become a society of "spiritual tinkers" (Robert Wuthnow), which makes developing and sustaining a Christian identity and religious commitments exceedingly difficult.
- **Increasing Influence of Individualism on Christian Identity and Community Life.** The influence of individualism means that religious identity is more autonomous and deliberate today and that religion is less anchored in a sense of belonging. There is a decline in connectedness; a weakening or severing of the *social* basis of religion in family, marriage, ethnicity, and community; a decline in the perceived necessity of communal or institutional structures as constituent of religious identity. Religious identity today is not only less bounded by doctrine or creed; it is also less nurtured and reinforced by community. Significant numbers of Americans see little necessary connection between being spiritual and being part of a historic tradition, or part of a disciplined community of faith. This is reinforced by the mass media's not-so-subtle message that you don't need a religious community to engage "God issues." Nominal membership increasingly replaces active involvement, a development paralleling national civic trends. Religion is less perceived as an inherited phenomenon, or as a binding community of discipleship and obligation. Religious leaders and institutions, which traditionally provided the framework within which religious meaning was constructed, have become increasingly peripheral to the spirituality and "lived religion" of private personal enterprise.
- **Changing Patterns of Marriage and Family Life.** It appears that one of the reasons for the decline in church participation is that younger Americans are marrying later, having fewer children, and having them later—all of which means that far more younger Americans are single and childless than was true a generation ago and that the same younger Americans are not settling into religious congregations at the same rate as their parents did in the 1970s. Religious practice is especially influenced by marrying, settling down, having children and raising them. Since individuals who marry are more likely to attend religious services than are those who delay marriage, the postponement of marriage and childbearing has contributed to the decline in church attendance. Also, there has been a dramatic increase in religiously mixed

marriages and partnerships: more than one-in-four (27%) American adults who are married or living with a partner are in religiously mixed relationships. If people from different Protestant denominational families are included, for example a marriage between a Methodist and a Lutheran, nearly four-in-ten (37%) marriages are religiously mixed.

- **Declining Family Religious Socialization.** Family religious socialization has always been the foundation for the development of faith and faith practices in children, and for participation in church life and worship. As Christian Smith observes, “teenagers with seriously religious parents are more likely than those without such parents to have been trained in their lives to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that that training “sticks” with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood. Emerging adults who grew up with seriously religious parents are through socialization more likely (1) to have internalized their parents religious worldview, (2) to possess the practical religious know-how needed to live more highly religious lives, and (3) to embody the identity orientations and behavioral tendencies toward continuing to practice what they have been taught religiously.” (Smith, 232) Significant indicators, such as religious identification as a Christian, worship attendance, marriages and baptisms in the church, and changing generational patterns, point to a decline in family religious socialization across all denominations, but especially among Catholic and Mainline traditions. Religious practice among the next generation of parents (young adults in their 20s and 30s) is especially influenced by marrying, settling down, having children and raising them. Since individuals who marry are more likely to attend religious services than are those who delay marriage, the postponement of marriage and childbearing has contributed to the decline in church attendance. Complicating this picture, is the fact that an ever growing percentage of Christians (at least 30%) are not getting married in a religious ceremony. The less contact that young adults have with the Christian tradition through participation in a local church, the less family religious socialization that is likely to take place when they marry and have children.
- **Increasing Impact of Digital Media and Web Technologies.** Technology and digital media are transforming the ways we live. Globalization and pluralism are driven by this unprecedented technological change. People meet on Facebook and share their inspirations on YouTube all the while Twittering to an assortment of friends. Groups of people at opposite ends of a continent or around the globe don’t need to leave their own contexts in order to meet in real time and in video, on Skype or some Webinar format. Social connectivity is being leveraged globally online. People’s use of the internet’s capabilities for communication—for creating, cultivating, and continuing social relationships—is undeniable. However, time spent online often takes time away from important face-to-face relationships. Virtually all of those 29 and younger in the U.S. today are online (as of 2010): 93% of teens (12-17) and young adults (18-29), 81% of adults 30-49 years old, 70% of adults 50-64 years old, and 38% of adults 65 and over. Increasingly people are accessing the internet on smart phones like the iPhone: sending or receiving text messages, taking a picture, playing a game, checking email, recording video, instant messaging, playing music, getting maps or directions, or recording and watching video. Media are among the most powerful forces in young people’s lives today. Eight- to eighteen-year-olds spend more time with media than in any other activity besides (maybe) sleeping—an average of more than 7½ hours a day, seven days a week. The TV shows they watch, video games they play, songs they listen to, books they read, and websites they visit are an enormous part of their lives, offering a constant stream of messages about families, peers, relationships, gender roles, sex, violence, food, values, clothes, and an abundance of other topics too long to list. How will these new digital technologies transform our lives and our religious identities? What will be the impact of this technological revolution on faith formation and Christian congregations?

2. Two Critical Uncertainties for Faith Formation 2020

After careful study of the significant driving forces, two uncertainties were selected from a longer list of potential uncertainties that might shape the broader context of church and faith formation over the next decade and longer. The framework for the final set of scenarios is a matrix with two axes that represent the two critical uncertainties in the external environment that will affect the future of faith formation from 2010-2020. The two chosen uncertainties, introduced below, together define a set of four scenarios for the future of faith formation in churches that are divergent, challenging, internally consistent, and plausible. Each of the two uncertainties is expressed as an axis that represents a continuum of possibilities ranging between two endpoints.

- **Relationship with Organized Religion & Christianity:** *Will trends in U.S. culture lead people to become more receptive to organized religion, and in particular Christianity, over the next decade or will trends lead people to become more resistant to organized religion and Christianity?*
- **Hunger for and Openness to God & the Spiritual Life:** *Will people's hunger for and openness to God and the spiritual life increase over the next decade or will people's hunger for and openness to God and the spiritual life decrease.*

Relationship with Organized Religion and Christianity

This uncertainty refers to the social and cultural trends regarding people's attitudes and responses to organized religion and, in particular Christianity, in the U.S. Will people be more or less receptive to Christianity and involved in churches in the next decade? Several of the eight significant forces describe the current trajectory of this uncertainty: declining number of Christians; growing number of people with no religious affiliation; increasing number of people becoming more "spiritual" and less "religious;" declining participation in Christian churches; increasing influence of individualism on Christian identity and community life; changing patterns of marriage and family life, especially delaying marriage and having children later; and declining family religious socialization. Will these trends continue and, if they do, what will be the impact on Christian churches and faith formation? How will churches respond to this uncertainty over the next decade?

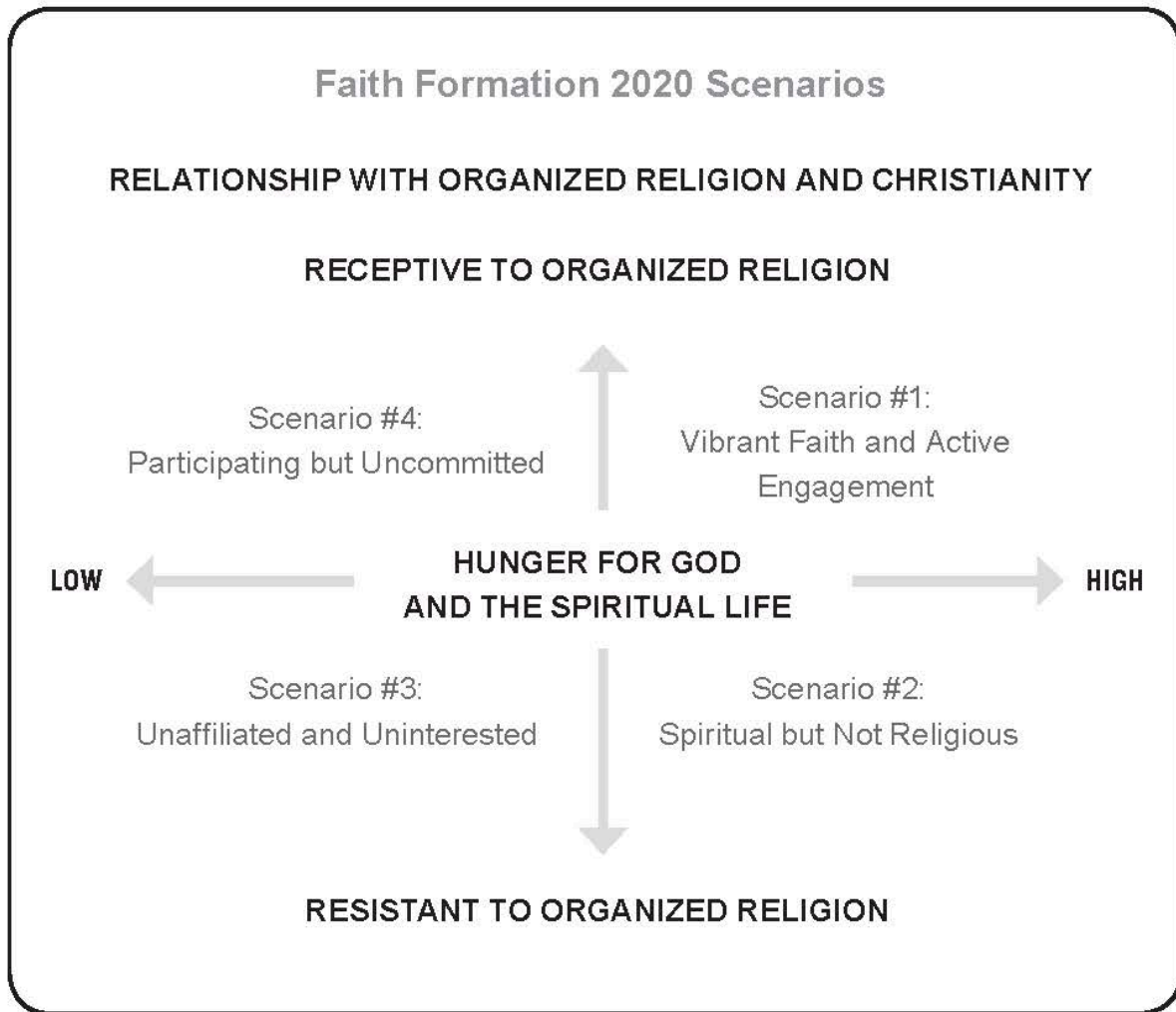
Hunger for and Openness to God and the Spiritual Life

This uncertainty refers to the importance of God and the spiritual life in the lives of people today. Will people's hunger and openness increase or decrease over the next decade? Several of the eight significant forces describe the current trajectory of this uncertainty: declining numbers of Christians; increasing number of people becoming more "spiritual" and less "religious;" declining participation in Christian churches; increasing diversity and pluralism in U.S. society resulting in a tapestry of religious and spiritual alternatives and choices; increasing influence of individualism on Christian identity and community life resulting in "spiritual tinkering" and more individualized spirituality; declining family religious socialization, and utilizing the digital media and technological tools to access a diversity of spiritual traditions and resources, and to participate in online communities of support and spiritual growth. Will these trends continue and, if they do, what will be the impact on Christian churches and faith formation? How will churches respond to this uncertainty over the next decade?

3. Four Scenarios for Faith Formation 2020

When the two critical uncertainties are connected in a 2x2 matrix, a set of four stories—or scenarios—are created to describe how the future of faith formation in 2020 could evolve. This matrix represents a map of today and a moving image of future reality. That is, each of the four quadrants of this map represents a dynamic story that is based on a different future outcome of the two critical uncertainties. *Which of the*

scenarios will rise in ascendency over the next decade? Where are people in our churches and culture moving? What will be the response of Christian churches to the four scenarios?



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

Scenario #1. Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first scenario describes a world in which people of all ages and generations are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. People have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for all ages and generations to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, at home and at church, that

develops vibrant faith, is continuous throughout life, and engages all people in the life and mission of the church community.

In most congregations the overwhelming majority of resources, energy, and leadership are directed toward faith formation with people in Scenario #1, oftentimes with a decreasing number of people for a shorter period of the lifespan (e.g., grade school through high school years). The future of faith formation in Scenario #1 is being significantly impacted by a number of driving forces including: 1) the growing number of people who are leaving established Christian churches—people who claim no religious affiliation (about 15% of the population) and those who consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (almost 20% of 18-39 year-olds); 2) declining participation in Christian worship, sacraments and rituals (baptism and marriage), and church life, in general, among those who consider themselves Christian; and 3) a serious decline in family religious socialization at home as few parents make passing on a faith tradition and faith practices central to family life.

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #1

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Develop continuous faith formation for all ages and generations, especially for adults (twenties-nineties), that engages people—mind, body, heart, and spirit—in a diversity of ways to grow in faith for a lifetime.
- Strengthen family socialization by equipping parents and families to become centers of faith formation and practice.
- Become a “sticky” church—keeping all ages involved in faith formation through a diversity of programs, activities, and resources at home and church that address their life situations and religious and spiritual needs.
- Embrace the tremendous potential of digital media and web technologies to provide faith formation and engage people in lifelong faith growth 24x7x365.
- Empower people of vibrant faith with the knowledge, faith sharing skills, and confidence to share their faith with those who are not involved in a church community or spiritually committed.

Scenario #2. Spiritual, but Not Religious

The second scenario describes a world in which people are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but most likely are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service, or in online spiritual resources and communities. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among the eighteen- to thirty-nine-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to engage people where they live (physical and virtual communities), build relationships, engage in spiritual conversations, and offer programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth.

Scenario #3. Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The third scenario describes a world in which people experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated and Uninterested reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among the eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to find ways to “plant” themselves in the midst of the cultures and worlds of the Unaffiliated and Uninterested, build relationships, and be witnesses to the Christian faith in the world today.

If the statistics are accurate, the growing numbers of people reflected in Scenarios #2 and #3, especially people in their 20s and 30s, present the greatest challenge to congregations and to their faith formation efforts, now and into the future. The challenge presented by these two scenarios is expanding the

congregation's vision of faith formation to embrace the life worlds—and spiritual needs—of people in Scenario #2 and #3 who see little need for church, and the need for God and the spiritual life. Congregations need to develop strategies and approaches for moving faith formation from the church campus into the world.

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #2

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Invest time and resources to develop specialized faith formation around the life situations and spiritual needs of the “Spiritual, but Not Religious” who are in their twenties and thirties.
- Provide faith formation programming for spiritual seekers that is conducted in “Third Place” settings outside of the church facilities (e.g., Lifetree Café).
- Develop faith formation around marriage and baptism to respond to the potential for (re)engagement in church life of the “Spiritual, but Not Religious?”
- Provide a guided process and program for spiritually hungry people to investigate the Christian faith and join in small communities with other seekers for spiritual growth and support (e.g., the Alpha course).

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #3

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Establish a “Third Place” gathering site as a platform for reaching the “Unaffiliated and Uninterested” through a variety of spiritual and/or life-centered programs, conversations, and activities?
- Develop a “web-presence” that is inviting and attractive to the “Unaffiliated and Uninterested” so that they can investigate and experience the Christian faith online.
- Sponsor programs, such as service projects and mission trips, that are designed so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.

Scenario #4. Participating, but Uncommitted

The fourth scenario describes a world in which people attend church activities, but are not actively engaged in their church community or spiritually committed. They may participate in significant seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, and celebrate sacraments and milestone events, such as marriage and baptism. Some may even attend worship regularly, and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that recognizes that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (spiritual commitment) and a more vibrant faith, and develop approaches for increasing people's engagement with the church community and the Christian tradition.

Scenario #4 reflects a growing number of people who, while receptive to an established church, do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment. Congregations often address the spiritual and religious needs of people in Scenario #4 through the lens of Scenario #1, which doesn't usually work effectively. Congregations need to begin in the life worlds of Scenario 4 and craft faith formation around their spiritual and religious needs, and their relationship with the faith community.

Strategies for Faith Formation in Scenario #4

Here are few examples of strategies for envisioning the possibilities for the future:

- Begin faith formation with the birth and baptism of children in order to strengthen family socialization by equipping parents and families to become centers of faith formation and practice.

- Develop pathways for spiritual commitment and more active engagement by offering a formation process that helps people develop and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ, explore the foundational teachings of the Christian faith, and live the fundamental Christian practices.
- Utilize digital media and web technologies to extend faith formation—resources, social networking, faith practices—into the daily lives of people who only participate occasionally?
- Focus on the occasions of participation, such as sacraments and milestones, to provide faith formation that involves the whole family, and invites them into more active engagement in the church community.

Apply the Four Scenarios to Your Church

Use the following questions to explore how each scenario applies in your church.

- Who are the people in your community in this scenario? How would you describe them?
- What are their religious and spiritual needs of people in this scenario? How would you describe one or two aspects of their religious and spiritual hopes or desires?
- How is your church addressing the spiritual and religious needs of people in this scenario through faith formation today?

Assess the Impact of the Four Scenarios on Your Church

Use the following questions to explore the impact of each scenario on your church.

- What are the *challenges* that this scenario presents for the future of faith formation in your church community?
- What are the *opportunities* that this scenario presents for the future of faith formation in your church community?
- What are the *implications* of not addressing the future of faith formation in this scenario?
- What are the *implications* of addressing the future of faith formation in this scenario?

4. Strategies & Ideas for Bringing the Four Faith Formation Scenarios to Life

- Strategy 1. Faith Formation through the Life of the Whole Church (Scenarios 1 and 4)
- Strategy 2. Faith Formation using Digital Media and Web Technologies (All Scenarios)
- Strategy 3. Family Faith Formation (Scenarios 1, 2, and 4)
- Strategy 4. Intergenerational Faith Formation (Scenarios 1 and 4)
- Strategy 5. Generational Faith Formation (Scenarios 1, 2, and 4)
- Strategy 6. Milestones Faith Formation (All Scenarios)
- Strategy 7. Faith Formation in Christian Practices (All Scenarios)
- Strategy 8. Transforming the World: Engagement in and Formation for Service and Mission (All Scenarios)
- Strategy 9. Spiritual Formation (All Scenarios)
- Strategy 10. Multi-Ethnic Faith Formation (All Scenarios)
- Strategy 11. Faith Formation for Spiritual Seekers (Scenario 2)
- Strategy 12. Apprenticeships in Discipleship (Scenarios 2 and 4)
- Strategy 13. Pathways to Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement (Scenarios 2 and 4)
- Strategy 14. Faith Formation in Third Place Settings (Scenarios 2 and 3)
- Strategy 15. Empowering the Community to Share their Faith (Scenario 1)
- Strategy 16. Interfaith Education and Dialogue (Scenario 1)

Six Faith Formation Models

Churches can use the six faith formation models to (1) inventory their current faith formation programs, activities, and resources, (2) uncover new faith formation opportunities, and (3) design faith formation that offers the same “content” in six different models, giving people six ways to learn and grow in faith. The six faith formation models 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, and presentations at universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, regional church programs; through engagement in community/political action, local and global service and justice projects

Every faith formation activity plan for an age group or family can offer a variety of faith formation models with differing levels of depth and commitment, in online and face-to-face settings, and at a variety of times and locations that are convenient for people. This approach means that people can have a variety of ways to learn and grow in faith, removing many of the more common obstacles to participating in faith formation.

The six faith formation models expand the ways a church can address a particular spiritual or religious need, a church event or church year season, the Bible and biblical teachings, and the religious tradition and teachings. For example, a faith formation activity plan for adults during Lent could include the following activities:

- providing a book of Scripture readings, reflections, and prayers for each day of Lent (print and online)
- making all the sermons/homilies during Lent available online in mp3 files with a personal and small group study guide
- providing daily Bible reading, reflections, and prayer emailed to adults and available online
- sponsoring a Sunday morning Bible study on the Lenten lectionary readings offered after the Sunday worship service, and an online small group meeting during the week to study and reflect on the readings
- presenting a guest speaker for a two-evening program on Lenten themes during the first two weeks of Lent; making the video of the two presentations available online in a podcast with a study guide
- promoting a retreat day on a Lenten theme sponsored by the local retreat house the week prior to Holy Week
- providing resources for Lenten study and reflection online
- celebrating a reconciliation service during the third week of Lent

Face-to-Face & Virtual Online Faith Formation

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 (an iPod Touch, smart cell phones, iPad) mean that churches can deliver faith formation experiences and resources anytime and anywhere, reaching people wherever they go online (home, work, school, vacation, coffee house). The interplay between learning in physical places and virtual online spaces can revolutionize faith formation in a church.

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 or intergenerational program on the coming year's lectionary cycle of readings, such as the Gospel of Luke. The learning from this short program is then extended and deepened with (1) online weekly commentaries and activities on the Sunday readings from the Gospel of Luke, (2) an 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 integrates faith formation in virtual spaces (online) with faith formation in physical spaces using the six faith formation models. For example, a church can use its website to develop an online spiritual formation center focusing on spiritual disciplines and practices and using a variety of already existing resources.

On Your Own

- Daily prayer delivered to people's computers and mobile devices: www.sacredspace.ie, www.taize.fr, www.upperroom.org, www.loyolapress.com
- Fixed hour prayer online: www.explorefaith.org/prayer/fixed/hours.php
- Spiritual guides and mentoring available for people
- Spiritual reading: a list of recommended books on the church website
- Online retreat: *A Thirty-Four week retreat for Everyday Life* from Creighton University, (<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/cmo-retreat.html>)
- Online spirituality course: forty-day retreats with spiritual guides like Thomas Merton, Joyce Rupp, Henri Nouwen, and Joan Chittister from Spirituality and Practice (www.SpiritualityandPractice.com)

At Home

- Weekly and seasonal prayer resources: online and in booklets

In Small Groups

- Prayer groups

- Spiritual formation course: *Companions in Christ: A Small-Group Experience in Spiritual Formation* for adults, *The Way of Pilgrimage* for youth, and *Companions in Christ: The Way of the Child* for children (Upper Room, www.companionsinchrist.org)
- Spiritual book clubs: monthly meetings to discuss the book-of-the-month

In Large Groups

- Intergenerational learning programs on prayer: monthly sessions for all ages on prayer practices
- Retreat experiences 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 to experience monastic life and prayer

In the Congregation

- Church-wide retreat experience
- Prayer room with resources about prayer and spiritual practices
- Advent and Lent prayer services

Faith Formation 2020 Scenarios

Relationship with Organized Religion and Christianity

Receptive to Organized Religion

Scenario #4

Participating but Uncommitted

The fourth scenario describes a world in which people attend church activities but are not actively engaged in their church community or spiritually committed. They may participate in significant seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, and celebrate sacraments and milestone events, such as marriage and baptism. Some may even attend worship regularly, and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that recognizes that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (spiritual commitment) and a more vibrant faith, and develop approaches for increasing people's engagement with the church community and the Christian tradition.

Scenario #1

Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first scenario describes a world in which people of all ages and generations are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and are growing in their faith. People have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for all ages and generations to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, at home and at church, that develops vibrant faith, is continuous throughout life, and engages all people in the life and mission of the church community.

LOW

Hunger for God and the Spiritual Life

HIGH

Scenario #3

Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The third scenario describes a world in which people experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated and Uninterested reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among the 18-29-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to find ways to "plant" themselves in the midst of the cultures and worlds of the Unaffiliated and Uninterested, build relationships, and be witnesses to the Christian faith in the world today.

Scenario #2

Spiritual but Not Religious

The second scenario describes a world in which people are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but mostly likely not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a non-denominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service—or in online spiritual resources and communities. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among the 18-39-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to engage people where they live (physical and virtual communities), build relationships, engage in spiritual conversations, and offer programs and activities that nourish their spiritual growth.

Resistant to Organized Religion