

Part Four

Capacity Building for Parish Vitality

Capacity building is whatever is needed to bring an organization to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, in order to more effectively and efficiently fulfill its mission. Capacity building refers to activities that improve and enhance an organization's ability to achieve its mission and sustain itself over time. Examples include: identifying a communications strategy, improving volunteer recruitment, identifying more efficient uses of technology, and engaging in collaborations with community partners. When capacity building is successful, it strengthens an organization's ability to fulfill its mission over time and enhances the organization's ability to have a significant, positive impact on lives and communities.

1. What will implementing plans for strengthening parish vitality, developing innovations, and/or reaching new audiences require of the parish?

- What will it require of **Parish Leadership** (e.g., competencies, skills, processes and procedures)?
- What will it require in **People Resources** (e.g., committees, ministries, parish organizations, parishioners)?
- What will it require in **Material Resources** (e.g., facilities, technologies, print and digital resources)?
- What will it require in **Financial Resources**?
- What will it require in **Collaborating and Partnering** with organizations outside the parish (e.g., local churches and synagogues, school/colleges, community organizations, diocesan agencies)?

2. What resources (capacity) can the parish community and its leadership bring to strengthening parish vitality, developing innovations, and/or reaching new audiences?

- **People Resources:** What resources (gifts, talents, competencies) can you identify in the people of your parish, community, local educational institutions, and religious organization who can take a leadership role in implementing your plan?
- **Organizational Resources:** What resources (programs, services) can you identify in organizations, such as local churches and synagogues, school/colleges, community organizations, retreat and conference centers, diocesan agencies, and religious organizations, that you can utilize in implementing your plan?
- **Print and Media Resources:** What print and media resources from publishers, educational institutions, commercial media, and religious organizations can you use in implementing your plan?
- **Web and Social Media Technologies, and Digital Media:** What digital and online resources can you use in implementing your plan (websites, online activities, online courses, social networks)? How will you utilize a parish website, social media, and web technologies to implement your plan?
- **Material Resources:** What physical settings (facilities) in the parish and in the community are available for implementing your plan?
- **Financial Resources:** What sources of financial assistance are available for implementing your plan (parish budget, fundraising, participant fees, grants, sponsorships)?

Developing Capacity through a Network Approach

(From: Chapter 2 in *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation*. John Roberto)

How can congregations design the future of faith formation using the four scenarios as a guide for addressing the life situations and spiritual and religious needs of a wide diversity of people? The future of faith formation will, in large part, be determined by how well churches provide comprehensive, lifelong faith formation that is inclusive of all ages and generations and responsive to the diverse life situations, and spiritual and religious needs of people in all four scenarios: people of vibrant faith and active engagement in a church, people who participate in church life but are not spiritually committed, people who are spiritual but not engaged in a church community, and people who are uninterested in the spiritual life and not affiliated with a church community.

One way to provide comprehensive faith formation for everyone, anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365 is by developing a *Lifelong Faith Formation Network* of programs, activities, and resources that incorporate a variety of ways to learn in a blended approach to faith formation integrating physical face-to-face settings and virtual online settings and utilizing a wide variety of faith formation resources and programs, people and communities. The design process integrates your church's current faith formation programs, activities, and resources with the creation of new initiatives—strategies, programs, activities, resources—specifically designed to address new spiritual and religious needs of people in each scenario.

Key Features of a Lifelong Faith Formation Network

A Lifelong Faith Formation Network is a way to provide faith formation for everyone, anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365. The Network approach to lifelong faith formation has six key features:

1. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, spiritual and religious needs, and interests of all ages and generations in the four scenarios by offering a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources.
2. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* guides individuals and families in discerning their spiritual and religious needs and creating personal learning pathways—a seasonal or annual plan for faith growth and learning.
3. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* incorporates informal learning, as well as formal learning in faith formation.
4. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* utilizes a variety of faith formation models to address the diverse life tasks and situations, religious and spiritual needs, and interests of people: learning on your own, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and in the community and world.
5. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* blends face-to-face, interactive faith formation programs and activities with virtual, online faith formation programs, activities, and resources.
6. *A Lifelong Faith Formation Network* incorporates communities of practice to connect individuals and groups throughout the congregation.

1. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, spiritual and religious needs, and interests of all ages and generations in the four scenarios by offering a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources.

To address the diversity of people in each of the four scenarios, churches need to offer a wider variety of faith formation offerings in physical and virtual settings. Today churches have available to them the resources and tools to provide lifelong faith formation for *all* ages and generations and to address the religious and spiritual needs of people in each of the four scenarios. Churches can utilize the life of their faith community; the variety of excellent print, audio, and visual resources in faith formation; the new digital media and online technologies; and the innovations and resources of other Christian churches to develop faith formation that varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing.

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

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

Faith formation is no longer about finding *the* program for a particular age group or generation. Churches can now meet people at the point of their spiritual, religious, and learning needs and offer personalized pathways for faith growth. Today, as never before, church have access to faith formation programming, activities, and resources that can be personalized and customized to address the diversity of people’s religious and spiritual needs. Resources for learning abound in every environment (at home, in the church, in the community, online). A primary task of a Lifelong Faith Formation Network is to identify these resources and link individuals, families, and communities with them effectively. The new reality of faith formation programming is that churches can offer activities that cater to niches—individuals, families, and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue. They no longer have to worry about reaching a “mass audience” with “one size fits all” programming.

2. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network guides individuals and families in discerning their spiritual and religious needs and creating personal learning pathways—a seasonal or annual plan for faith growth and learning.

Expanding the options for faith formation by offering “something for everyone,” means that churches can engage more people in faith formation, even if some of the offerings involve only one person. This

respects the principle that *learning is a process of active inquiry with initiative residing in the learner*. Increasingly today, due in part to the web and social media, people are searching out what they want to know, when they want and need to know it. People are becoming more and more self-directed in their learning, and they have almost unlimited access to information through the Internet and the wide variety of print and media learning resources available in our society today. Giving power to individuals and families to shape their own learning does not mean abandoning them to their own devices. Rather, it creates a new role and responsibility for faith formation leaders—to serve as guides and facilitators helping people identify growth needs, finding resources and settings for faith formation, identifying next steps on their journey, and so on.

A Lifelong Faith Formation Network, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, can guide people in creating their own personal learning pathways. Churches can develop processes for helping individuals and families diagnose their religious and spiritual learning needs (online and in-person) and create their own annual or season plan for faith growth and learning. A “faith growth learning plan” helps people identify where they are on their spiritual journey, what they need for continuing their growth, who else might share that need, and the resources that could help them meet that need. Churches can provide mentors or guides to assist people in developing their spiritual growth plan and accessing the programs and resources that fit their plan. Mentors or guides can be available for one-on-one conversations as people move through their growth plan.

One example of a spiritual discernment approach can be found in the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. In their adult faith formation process, they utilize a spiritual assessment and a spiritual growth plan to help the adults in the community grow in faith (www.cor.org/programs-ministries/the-journey/welcome-to-your-self-assessment). They describe the process in the following words:

We invite you to join us on the greatest journey of your life—the Journey of Knowing, Loving and Serving God—as we strive to become a community of deeply committed Christians. We know that sometimes getting started can be daunting, especially in such a large church, but we want to travel this journey with you. Our Adult Discipleship Ministry offers you a navigation system that provides directions, routes and traveling companions to support and encourage you along the way. We believe that nothing in the world will bring you greater joy, greater challenge, and greater meaning than the journey into life as God intended us to live it. To help encourage and equip you for your Journey, we’ve created the Journey assessment tool. The “next steps” chart offers recommendations for spiritual growth. Go online to: www.cor.org/next-steps or the Connection Point in the Narthex of Resurrection Church to view detailed listing of classes and service opportunities and to register.

Churches can engage families more consciously, actively, and experientially in learning, growing in faith, and participating in church life through an annual, multi-dimensional faith growth plan. The annual plan can be a blend of whole family activities and individual parent-child activities. Families can be organized into groups, each with a leader who meets with the family group regularly to facilitate learning and reflection. Churches set expectations for learning and participation. Families create their annual plan around a menu of offerings designed to help them fulfill the church’s expectations, for example: (1) participating in Sunday worship (regularly, but at least twice monthly); (2) participating in important church year feasts and celebrations, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week; (3) participating in monthly family learning programs on religious themes; (4) participating in at least six mission/service projects during the year, (5) participating in an annual spiritual formation retreat experience, and (6) engaging in family home practices, such as reading the Bible, celebrating rituals and traditions, and praying.

3. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network incorporates *informal* learning, as well as *formal* learning in faith formation.

Learning is a lifelong process and people need access to a wide variety of learning activities throughout life. We are a society of lifelong learners. Learning in adulthood is now taken as normative. Over the twelve-month period from Spring 2004–2005 (the latest year statistics are available), 44% of adults in the United States reported having participated in *formal* adult educational activities, excluding full-time only enrollments in college/university or vocational/technical credential programs. The 44% of adults who participated in formal adult educational activities were divided almost equally between work-related courses (27% of all adults in the U.S.) and personal interest courses (21% of all adults in the United States).

By most estimates *informal learning* accounts for more than 70% of adult learning taking place today. In what is known as the 70/20/10 learning concept. Robert Eichinger and Michael Lombardo, in collaboration with Morgan McCall of the Center for Creative Leadership, explain that 70% of learning and development takes place from real-life and on-the-job experiences, tasks, and problem solving; 20% of the time learning and development comes from other people through information and formal feedback, mentoring, or coaching; and 10% of learning and development comes from formal training.

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

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

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

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

Most of faith formation efforts in churches are *formal* and *intentional* learning through organized programs. Churches can expand their faith formation efforts by promoting all four types of learning. For example, Sunday worship is *informal* and *intentional* learning. A church can help people learn from their participation in worship through a weekly journal or activities booklet (online and in print) with

reflection questions on the Scripture readings and the sermon. The readings and sermon can also be available in print or audio for further study on the church's website. The journal or activities booklet could also be used in a weekly faith sharing group or in table discussion after Sunday worship. These are all examples of informal and intentional learning activities. Where are the *informal* learning opportunities for people of all ages and for families in your congregation and community?

4. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network utilizes a variety of faith formation models to address the diverse life tasks and situations, religious and spiritual needs, and interests of people.

With such a wide diversity of people and needs, a Lifelong Faith Formation Network provides a diversity of content and activities, *and* a variety of ways for people to engage the content and activities. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network incorporates six faith formation models—on your own, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and in the community and world—providing a variety of faith formation models for people to learn and growth in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. 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

5. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network blends face-to-face, interactive faith formation programs and activities with virtual, online faith formation programs, activities, and resources.

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. (See Strategy #9 Spiritual Formation in chapter 4 for additional ideas and 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

- 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
- Prayer groups

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

6. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network incorporates communities of practice to connect individuals and groups throughout the congregation.

One way to keep individuals and groups engaged in faith formation connected to each other in the Lifelong Faith Formation Network is through communities of practice—groups of people who have a shared interest who come together to learn from each other. Communities of practice have three dimensions: the domain (what it’s about); the topic (the issues that they are facing); and the community (the people who are involved). Communities of practice use a variety of approaches to connect, such as face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, video conferencing, social networking, working on projects together. It is a mix of formal and informal methods. Some of them are online; some of them are face-to-face. Some of them happen weekly; some of them happen monthly or yearly.

A congregation is a community of practice. Practices like worship, liturgy, pastoral care, outreach, and social justice are important to the congregation’s vitality. What you want are people who are passionate about those practices to develop them so that they are thriving in the congregation. An example would be people in a congregation who are engaged in justice and service projects—in the church and in the world—who could regularly connect, and even meet, to share their reflections and insights, communicate their insights to the whole congregation, and continue to support each other in their efforts. They can also invite new people to join their efforts. A community of practice around social justice could include not only church members, but also people in the wider community who have similar interests.

Another example might be people engaged in reading and studying the Bible. They may do this on their own or in small groups, but they are engaged in a large community of practice focused on reading and studying the book. A Lifelong Faith Formation Network connects these people, face-to-face or online, to share what they are learning and how they read and apply the Bible to daily life, to explore common issues in reading the Bible, review new resources, and educate new members (apprentices) in reading the Bible. The community of practice around reading and studying the Bible disseminates their learning throughout the congregation, providing a learning opportunity for all church members to grow in their understanding of the Bible.

Most of the skills and expertise we learn, we learn from others in practice. We don't learn it in a course or book. It's helpful to have those, but the way we really learn is in practice with other practitioners. If you have a community of practice, someone can say, "I'm calling you about what I saw on your website or on Facebook. I heard that you tried this, and I'd love to talk to you about it." Communities of practice can connect people and diffuse learning and Christian practices across the congregation. There are opportunities through the Lifelong Faith Formation Network to cultivate and support communities of practices around particular topics or issues or Christian practices.

Designing a Lifelong Faith Formation Network

The goal of the design process is to guide your church in developing and implementing a plan for a Lifelong Faith Formation Network, utilizing a wide variety of programs, activities and resources, that *builds* on the current faith formation offerings of your church and *expands* faith formation to address the religious and spiritual needs of people in the four scenarios of Faith Formation 2020.

Researching people, programs, activities, and resources to address the priority life issues and spiritual/religious needs.

Today, as never before, a local church has access to an abundance of adult faith formation programming, resources, and networks that can address the diversity of adult learning needs. Resources for learning abound in every environment; a primary task of a Lifelong Faith Formation Network is to identify these resources and link learners with them effectively. Using the list of the priority life issues and spiritual/religious needs as a guide, research the resources available to address these issues and needs. Eventually, many of these resources will become part of your *Lifelong Faith Formation Network*. Consider the following categories:

- **People Resources:** Conduct a gifts/talents/skills/knowledge survey of the people resources in your church, the wider community, the wider church (diocese/synod/regional church body), colleges and seminaries, church-related organizations, and so on. who can be invited to take a leadership role in a Lifelong Faith Formation Network. Consider people who teach courses or specialized programs, guest presenters on specialized topics, leaders for small groups and Bible studies, prayer guides/spiritual directors, leaders for service/mission programs, and so on.
- **Physical, Face-to-Face Faith Formation Programs and Activities:** Identify face-to-face faith formation activities that you can use to address priority issues and spiritual/religious needs. There are a variety of options: (1) programs that your church is already sponsoring, (2) an opportunity that you are not utilizing (for example, design reflection activities around Sunday worship), (3) a new program that your church can design or adopt, and (4) a program sponsored by another organization that you can promote as part of your plan. Consider programs in your church, the

wider community, the diocese/synod/regional church body, retreat and conference centers, colleges and universities, religious organizations, and so on. Indicate the faith formation model(s) used in the program: Faith Formation on Your Own, Faith Formation at Home, Faith Formation in Small Group, Faith Forming in Large Group, Faith Formation in the Congregation, and/or Faith Formation in the Community and World.

- **Print and Media Faith Formation Resources:** Identify print and media resources from publishers and religious organizations that you can use to address the priority issues and spiritual/religious needs.
- **Online Faith Formation Programs, Activities, and Resources:** Identify online faith formation programs, activities, social networks, and resources that you can use to address priority issues and spiritual/religious needs. Churches can utilize the ever increasing “library” of online resources: *books* (see Google Books), *courses* and *podcasts* (see iTunes University), *videos* (see YouTube and God Tube), *age-specific* sites (see Disciples Now, Busted Halo, Kids Spirit Online), *small group studies* (see The Thoughtful Christian), *multi-faceted religious content* (see Patheos), and so much more. These types of online programs, activities, and resources can become an integral element of learning programs and faith formation offerings for all ages and for families. Research the online resources of your own denomination or religious tradition, and online courses and webinars offered by colleges, universities, seminaries, and religious organizations.

Developing an online faith formation center for connecting people to each other and to the resources of the Lifelong Faith Formation Network.

The best way to implement the Lifelong Faith Formation Network is through an online center at your church’s website or on a new website or social networking platform. The capacity of web technology to connect us immediately and transparently to both people and content means that the constraints of the physical world need no longer limit our formational imaginations. Thanks to technology, the old notion of the “world as our classroom” has now become a practically possibility.

Even if your church website is not able to incorporate an online faith formation center, you can create a new, dedicated website for the *Network* using a service such as Weebly which even provides free hosting (see www.weebly.com) or a social networking platform like Ning (www.ning.com) which has a low annual fee. To see an example of a network using Ning go to the Book of Faith Initiative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (<http://bookoffaith.ning.com>). The purpose of the Book of Faith Initiative is to increase biblical literacy and fluency. The Bible of Faith Network on Ning includes (1) stories of churches implementing the Book of Faith Initiative, (2) a blog, (3) conversations, (4) interest groups, (5) videos and photos, (6) event listings, and (7) resources.

Another example of an online “network” approach to education is Glow, the world’s first national intranet for education, that is transforming the way the curriculum is delivered in Scotland (see www.ltscotland.org.uk/usingsglowandict). Glow provides a trusted and safe environment for pupils, practitioners and parents, a space to create personalized programs of work and share thinking and curricular resources, a variety of online tools to enhance learning experiences, virtual learning to share information and take part in a lesson, tools to communicate and collaborate across the network, communities of practice that offer practitioners rich opportunities to share and collaborate, innovation in learning and teaching approaches by engaging and immersing young people in powerful and relevant learning experiences, and motivation and support for individualized learning, personalization and choice.

Glow includes a variety of features, such as: (1) the *Glow Directory*, an index of all the users throughout Scotland, where users can find others with similar areas of interest or expertise, collaborate

across the country, and make connections with others to improve learning and teaching; (2) *Glow Group*, an area that connects people and ideas through communities of interest using tools such as discussion boards, chat rooms, document stores, image galleries, and web conferencing; (3) *Glow Meet*, a web conferencing tool allowing people to interact using video, audio, and a shared whiteboard space; (4) *Glow Learn*, the virtual learning environment (VLE) that includes tools to share, organize and search for digital resources and courses, and provide access to structured content; (5) *Glow Messenger*, an electronic messaging service allowing users to exchange text messages with others online immediately; and (6) *Glow Chat*, a moderated chat room that sits inside the secure online environment.

An online Lifelong Faith Formation Network would present all of the faith formation offerings of the church and searchable by each of the categories.

- People: age group, family, or generation
- Life tasks, religious and spiritual needs addressed
- Faith formation program, activity or resource
- Faith formation model (on your own, at home small group, large group, congregation, community and world)
- Dates and times
- Location (physical/facility and/or online/website)

The online Lifelong Faith Formation Network could incorporate the following features to help people develop their own individualized learning and faith growth plans. All of these features would be developed in response to the faith formation programs, activities, and resources identified in the Network.

- a calendar of all Network offerings
- registration procedures for face-to-face programs and activities
- resources recommended in the Network for people to use online or download
- links to recommended Network faith formation programs on other websites
- ways for people to connect with each other (social networking) and share their reflections, stories, faith practices, and so on.
- ways to extend relationships and learning initiated in church events and gathered faith formation programs
- ways for people to upload content to the site: articles, reflections, stories, audio files, and videos
- blogs organized by age groups or families or scenario or Network program/activity
- discussion threads and groups for kindred groups or connected to a Network program or activity
- online courses, Bible studies, and webinars for Network programs developed by the church or accessed online through seminaries, universities, publishers, iTunes University, and other online course providers
- audio and video podcasts recommend by the Network that be accessed through the website or with links to recommended sites such as iTunes and YouTube
- audio and video podcasts of gathered learning programs at the church
- links to free e-book libraries, such as Google Books and Internet Archive, and online Bibles, such as Bible Gateway and Biblica
- daily, weekly, and seasonal resources for all ages and families, including faith conversation activities, devotions and prayer, Bible reading activities and Bible studies, service projects, and rituals and traditions
- a milestones and life transitions center with sections for each milestone that include rituals, blessings, commentaries, personal stories, a “gathering space” for sharing stories and ideas

- themed “gathering spaces” for synchronous and asynchronous interaction, including live text-based chat and live audio/video conferences, threaded discussions, collected blog links, self-paced tutorials on a range of topics, and so on.
- a mission/service opportunity clearinghouse for local, national, and international internships, volunteer opportunities, and jobs

Many churches have begun to use their website as a faith formation network, reflecting many of the features that could be incorporated into a Lifelong Faith Formation Network. Explore Willowcreek Church: www.willowcreek.org; and <http://classes.willowcreek.org>; and the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection: www.cor.org; and www.cor.org/programs-ministries.

A Network Catalog

A church can also create a Lifelong Faith Formation Network catalog with annual or seasonal offerings (a “course catalog” and calendar) in print format and publish it in an online format with a calendar of events. The catalog includes descriptions for every faith formation activity (face-to-face and online), indicating clearly the content or focus of the program and the particulars, such as date, location, cost, time, website location, and so on. Explore the following examples of a catalog approach at these churches and download a sample of their catalogs: Ginghamburg Church (<http://ginghamsburg.org>, for children, youth, adult, and service/mission catalogs); and Holy Infant Catholic Parish (www.holyinfantchurch.org, for their faith formation handbook: <http://images.acswebnetworks.com/1/443/FaithFormationHandbook.pdf>).

Leadership: Becoming a Curator of Content

Leading a Lifelong Faith Formation Network with its diversity of programs, activities, and resources for all ages and generations will require a new role for leaders—to become *curators* of the faith formation content and experiences available to people in your congregation. The term “content curation” stems from traditional museum curation: museum curators collect art and artifacts and identify the most relevant or important to be displayed in an exhibit for the public. Museum curators are subject-matter experts that guide an organization’s overall art collection.

The role of content curators is now being applied to online content. In the near future, experts predict that content on the web will double every seventy-two hours. This dramatic increase in information requires content curators who continually find, group, organize, and share the best and most relevant content on a specific issue or topic. Content curators can provide a personalized, qualified selection of the best and most relevant content and resources available. They do not create more content, but make sense of all the content that others are creating.

A curator is an individual or organization who excels at helping others make sense. A good curator must be skilled at:

- locating and evaluating valuable content
- organizing and connecting content so that it is as accessible as possible
- creating and re-purposing content when it adds to the underlying value
- capitalizing on the Social Web to build connections and context
- building trusted relationships with learners and other curators
- design learning experiences

So how does content curation work? Just as librarians help us make sense of the overwhelming number of books and periodicals available in a library, content curators identify, organize, and share information that will be most relevant to their prospects.

1. **Identify:** The best librarians have access to hundreds, if not thousands, of information resources that deliver ongoing, real-time information on specific topics of interest to information patrons.
2. **Organize:** Librarians must consume and curate information in order to interpret and best understand how it addresses their patrons' information needs. Expert librarians can quickly process hundreds of documents daily, using tools that organize and automatically tag content, deliver summaries, and rank content as needed.
3. **Share:** This may be the easiest aspect of the curating role. Sharing requires that information is easily available for patrons to acquire and use on a recurring schedule. The internet—and a number of tools—makes it very easy to publish resources online. However, the best librarians are able to deliver relevant information, while also highlighting the relationships between that information so patrons can understand how all the content fits together.

Consider these three examples of content curation at work. The *NYTimes.com Topics* employs content managers who sift through *The Times'* archive to create new meaning by grouping articles and resources that were filed away (or distributed to library databases). The site also produces exceptional multimedia pieces akin to “special exhibitions,” which offer a documentary and reflective aspect to news content. NBC Universal's video site *Hulu* takes videos sourced from multiple networks and then rearranges them into collections that give a new perspective to the collection as a whole. Duke University Divinity School's *Faith and Leadership* (www.faithandleadership.com) incorporates a website with print, audio, and video resources; a daily e-newsletter; and blogs with a diversity of nationally recognized bloggers (*Call and Response*) designed for Christian leaders to reflect, connect, learn, read, discuss, and imagine. The team at *Faith and Leadership* creates new content and makes available existing content from a wide variety of sources relevant for Christian leaders.

Faith formation leaders in churches will increasingly need to become *content and experience curators* as they expand faith formation into all four Faith Formation 2020 scenarios, reach new audiences with faith formation, and identify (or develop) new programs, activities, and resources to serve the expanded scope of faith formation. To address this expanded scope, faith formation leaders will need to identify and access a wider variety of content and experiences available from publishers, other churches and religious organizations, websites, and other producers of content (programs, activities, and resources). They will need to assess and evaluate its quality and appropriateness, to organize the content, and then to share (or publish) the content through the Lifelong Faith Formation Network.

Among the many roles of the twenty-first-century faith formation leader, becoming a *curator of content* will be among the most important.

Resources

Scime, Erin. “The Content Strategist as Digital Curator.” *Content Strategy*.

www.alistapart.com/articles/content-strategist-as-digital-curator.

Rosenbaum, Steven. “Can Curation Save Media. www.businessinsider.com/can-curation-save-media-2009-4#ixzzoxMUJYYuI

Resources for the Lifelong Faith Formation Network

1. People Resources

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

Priority Needs	Potential Program Leader	Particular Gift/Talent/Skill/Knowledge

2. Face-to-Face Faith Formation Programs and Activities

Identify face-to-face faith formation activities that you can use to address priority issues and spiritual/religious needs. There are a variety of options: (1) programs that your church is already sponsoring, (2) an opportunity that you are not utilizing (for example, design reflection activities around Sunday worship), (3) a new program that your church can design or adopt, and (4) a program sponsored by another organization that you can promote as part of your plan. Consider programs in your church, the wider community, the wider church, retreat and conference centers, colleges and universities, and religious organizations. Indicate the faith formation model(s) used in the program: Faith Formation on Your Own, Faith Formation at Home, Faith Formation in Small Groups, Faith Formation in Large Groups, Faith Formation in the Congregation, and/or Faith Formation in the Community and World.

Priority Needs	Program	Faith Formation Model	Location	Date/Timing	Cost

3. Print and Media Faith Formation Resources

Identify print and media resources from publishers and religious organizations that you can use to address the priority issues and spiritual/religious needs. Indicate which of the six faith formation model(s) are used in the resource.

Priority Needs	Resource	Publisher	Faith Formation Model	Cost

4. Online Faith Formation Programs, Activities and Resources

Identify online faith formation programs, activities, social networks, and resources that you can use to address priority issues and spiritual/religious needs. Indicate which of the six faith formation model(s) are used in the activity.

Priority Needs	Website	Activity	Faith Formation Models	Website Address	Cost

Lifelong Faith Formation Network Plan

<u>People</u> - Age Group - Family - Generation	Life Tasks, Religious & Spiritual Needs	Faith Formation Program, Activity or Resource	Faith Formation <u>Model</u> - on your own - at home - small group - large group - congregation - community & world	Dates and Times	<u>Location</u> - physical/ facility - online/ website

Marketing Suggestions

Create Your Message

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

You may need to develop several “messages” for each target audience. Be sure to pay careful attention to the titles of your programs so that they capture people's interests. Develop descriptions that are positive in tone, indicate clearly the content or focus of the program, and include the particulars (date, location, cost, and time).

Develop Marketing Strategies for the Lifelong Faith Formation Network

1. Brainstorm marketing/promotion strategies: print catalog of the Network, website, online ads, e-newsletter, email, Facebook page, Twitter messages, and so on.
2. Use your church's website to promote the Network, post regular announcements, new program offerings, calendar, and so on.
3. Establish a Facebook site for your project and include a calendar of events with descriptions, locations, times, a link to your church's website, current news, stories from people who are participating, and so on.
4. Send email or regular mail invitations targeted to particular groups or ages.
5. Have the pastor share the benefits of the Network at Sunday worship.
6. Host information sessions to describe the Network, for example, after Sunday worship.
7. Promote the Network in the community: coffee shops, YMCA/YWCA, gyms, bookstores, theaters, schools/colleges, and so on.
8. Include information about the Network in new member packets. Send a personalized invitation to new members.
9. Promote the Network at all gathered programs and events in the church.