

Chapter Nine

Developing Twenty-First Century Adult Faith Formation

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How can we develop faith formation for every season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults? Adult formation for every adult is possible if we use twenty-first century practices, approaches, and resources. We will need new insights—drawn from research, theory, and practice—to inform us and guide the development of adult faith formation through the four seasons of adulthood. We will need new approaches and practices to engage all the seasons of an adult’s life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today’s world. We will need a new model of faith formation that provides a platform to reach *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community.

This chapter presents a planning process designed to bring to life twenty-first century adult faith formation—the holistic vision of faith and faith forming processes, the eight practices or features of twenty-first century faith formation, and a network model of faith formation that provides a way to reach all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood.

Let’s begin by recalling the eight key features of twenty-first century faith formation (see Chapter One for descriptions of each feature.)

1. Adult Faith Formation is *life-stage/generational*—addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of adulthood; and *intergenerational*—engaging adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in the intergenerational faith experiences.
2. Adult faith formation is *missional*—expanding and extending the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live; and providing pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community
3. Adult faith formation addresses the *diverse* life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood— young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s), and older adults (75+).
4. Adult faith formation provides a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood— young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

- Adult faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces
 - Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments – self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world – in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.
 - Adult faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning.
5. Adult faith formation recognizes that learning and growth is a *process of active inquiry* with initiative residing in the adult learner and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.
 6. Adult faith formation provides the opportunity for *personalized and customized* learning and faith growth, giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Adults are guided by trusted mentors who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning and spiritual needs.
 7. Adult faith formation is *digitally-enabled* – blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and *digitally-connected* – linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs , and daily/home life using online and digital media.
 8. Adult faith formation intentionally nurtures *communities of learning and practice* around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

In the twenty-first century, adult faith formation is developed in a network model. On the network people can experience the life and substance of the Christian faith in a way that expands both the content and environments and can be personalized and customized to their life and faith journey. The fundamental operating system and delivery system for faith formation is now the *network* and it is built on a digital platform (website).

A Network Planning Process for Adult Faith Formation

There are twelve planning steps for developing adult faith formation in a network model.

- Step 1. Prepare a statement of your church’s vision and goals for adult faith formation
- Step 2. Develop a profile of adult faith formation
- Step 3. Research your target audience and identify needs
- Step 4. Build the adult faith formation network design
- Step 5. Generate programming for the adult faith formation network
- Step 6. Design a season of adult faith formation programming
- Step 7. Build the digital platform – an adult faith formation website

- Step 8. Design a process for assessing and personalizing learning
- Step 9. Test the seasonal plan and web design
- Step 10. Launch the adult faith formation network
- Step 11. Evaluate the season of adult faith formation programming
- Step 12. Design the new season of adult faith formation programming

Preparation

First, decide on a target audience for planning. It is important to make this decision before gathering a planning task force. You can develop an adult faith formation plan for one stage of adulthood: young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-mid 50s), mature adults (mid 50s to mid 60s), or older adults (75+), or you can develop a plan for multiple stages of adulthood, or one plan for all adults. Smaller congregations may find it easier to develop a plan for multiple stages of adult. When selecting more than one stage of adulthood, it is important to develop content and approaches that reflect the particular needs of each stage (and avoid the “one size fits all” approach).

Second, develop an Adult Faith Formation Task Force to design the adult faith formation plan. The task force should include: 1) the faith formation coordinator, 2) church staff and ministry leaders who work with adults (in any ministry or program), and 3) adults from the target audience you have selected. If you are developing one plan for all adults be sure to invite at least one adult from each of the decades of adulthood (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s+). It is very helpful to have several people who bring experience and expertise in digital technologies and media, and social media.

The Task Force is responsible for designing an adult faith formation plan, organizing the implementation logistics, finding leaders and resources for the plan, monitoring progress, and conducting evaluations. The Task Force needs a coordinator/convener who facilitates the work of the Task Force in designing an adult faith formation plan, organizing implementation logistics, finding leaders and resources to implement the plan, monitoring progress and conducting evaluations, and serving as a liaison between the task force and the church and wider community.

Third, prepare the team by having them read Chapter One in this book and the chapter(s) in this book that describe your target adult audience (see Chapters 3-6). There are also a variety of articles on the four adult life stages on www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com, an online resource center for adult faith formation.

Planning Step 1. Prepare a Statement of Your Church’s Vision and Goals for Adult Faith Formation

Work together as a Task Force to prepare a short statement of your church’s vision and goals for adult faith formation. Together as a team review the important documents on the vision and goals for adult faith formation in your denomination. You might want to invite a guest speaker to present a workshop on the goals and vision of adult faith formation or find a video

presentation. You can go online to your denomination or contact your regional church body (diocese, synod, presbytery, district, etc.) for resources.

Planning Step 2. Develop a Profile of Adult Faith Formation

Develop a profile of your church’s current adult faith formation experiences, events, activities, and programming using the template below. Review Chapter 1 in this book for information about intergenerational, age-group, and missional faith formation with adults. Produce the profile on newsprint, in a written report, and/or on an Excel spreadsheet.

Faith-forming processes	Intergenerational events and experiences that involve adults	Young adult programs	Midlife adult programs	Mature adult programs	Older adult programs
Caring relationships: intergenerational and peer relationships, supportive communities					
Celebrating the liturgical seasons: feasts and seasons of the church year					
Celebrating rituals and milestones: celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones at significant moments in one’s life journey and faith journey					
Reading the Bible: studying and interpreting the Bible – its message, its meaning, and its application to life today					
Learning the Christian tradition: learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning					

in the world					
Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation: personal and communal prayer; being formed by the spiritual disciplines					
Serving and justice: living the Christian mission in the world – engaging in service to those in need, care for God’s creation, and action and advocacy for justice					

Worshipping God with the faith community: experiencing God’s living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission

Develop a profile of your congregations current missional activities with adults using the two categories in the template below. Produce the profile on newsprint, in a written report, and/or on an Excel spreadsheet.

Target adult audience	Expanding and extending the church’s presence through outreach in the community	Pathways to Jesus, discipleship, and the Christian faith

Review the profiles, use the following questions to discuss the results.

1. What are the strengths in our current adult faith formation?
2. What are the areas in need of development?
3. Who are we currently serving? Who are we *not* serving? Do we have outreach and programming directed toward the “churchless” – the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested?
4. Do we have strong intergenerational connections and programming for this target audience?
5. Are we utilizing online/digital programming and resources with this target audience?

6. Do we have a variety of learning environments for this target audience: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world?

Planning Step 3. Research Your Target Audience and Identify Needs

Planning begins with listening. Take time to conduct research on your target audience(s): young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-mid 50s), mature adults (mid 50s to mid 60s), or older adults (75+). Be sure read the chapter(s) in this book that describe your target adult audience (see Chapters 3-6). There are also a variety of articles on the four adult life stages on www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com, an online resource center for adult faith formation.

Adult faith formation address the whole life of adults – social, ethnic-cultural, psychological, physical, spiritual, religious, and more. Research the live of adults using these five categories.

1. *Life Stage*: What's happening in the lives and world of young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults today: developmental life tasks, family life, work life, leisure, relationships, sexuality, suffering and grief, social and political issues, community issues, and more?
2. *Generational*. What is the generational identity and the unique generational characteristics and needs of Millennials (young adults), Generation X (midlife adults), Baby Boomers (mature adults), and Builders (older adults)?
3. *Milestones and Transitions*. What are the significant milestones and transitions in the lives of adults: marriages, births, graduations, geographic relocations, family formation and re-formation, career changes, launching children and empty nests, retirement, unanticipated illness, divorce, loss of loved ones, and more.
4. *Ethnic/Cultural Life*. What are the unique lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of adults within the ethnic/cultural communities represented in the congregation and wider community? What are the unique faith traditions and practices of adults in these ethnic/cultural communities?
5. *Spiritual and Religious Journeys*: What are the significant spiritual and religious needs, interests, and concerns at each stage of adulthood? What are the unique characteristics and needs of adults across the spectrum of faith and practice – from adults who are growing in faith and actively engaged in the church community to adults who are spiritual but not religious and not involved in the church community to adults who are unaffiliated from established religion.

Conduct focus group research with adults.

Organize focus groups of eight-twelve adults in the target audience(s) you have selected. If you selected multiple adult life stages, organize at least one focus group for each life stage. If you selected one life stage, organize several focus groups of adults in that life stage. Select a diversity of adults in each focus group, reflecting ethnic/cultural diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and spiritual and religious diversity (from the actively engaged to the “churchless”). Meet for about one hour in a variety of locations and times. Remember that people who are not involved in church may be hesitant to come to a meeting at church. Have two people lead each focus group – one to record (on a computer or tablet is preferable) and one to ask the

questions. The recorder can also ask follow-up questions as appropriate. Use the following questions as a guide for developing focus group interviews. Every focus group needs to use the same questions so that comparisons can be made across the groups. In a 60-minute focus group there is usually time for at least seven questions that you can select from the following list. Feel free to adapt the questions for your church, but make sure everyone uses the same questions.

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

Compile the results from focus groups by identifying patterns or recurring themes in the life tasks and spiritual and religious needs. Also pay attention to information that may be unique to one focus group. Sometimes this uncovers important insights about the target audience.

Conduct observation of the target audience in the community.

Engage the team in becoming anthropologists by observing adults in the community. Develop an observation checklist and ask team members to spend a week simply observing people at work, at play, at stores, in coffee shops and restaurants, and so on. Watch for things like:

1. What are some of the most popular activities in the community?
2. Where do people gather outside of work and school – coffee shop, gym, mall, park, community center, YMCA/YWCA, and so on? What are they doing there?
3. Where do people work? Do most people work in the community or do they commute to another area? What types of jobs do people have?
4. What are the most popular or well-attended churches in the community?
5. Where are people on Sunday morning, if they are not at worship?

Find patterns in the research findings.

An “Empathy Map,” developed by the Stanford School of Design, is one tool to synthesize observations and draw out insights from the research. Organize research findings into the following four quadrants: What are people saying, doing, thinking, and feeling? Do this activity as a research team and use one or more sheets of newsprint to compile the findings. If

you have address multiple adult life stages, it would be helpful to do an “Empathy Map” for each life stage.

Empathy Map

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 98.)

Say	Do
What do you hear your target group saying?	What actions and behaviors do you notice in your target group?
Think	Feel
What might your target group be thinking? What does this tell you about their beliefs/convictions?	What emotions might your target group be feeling?

Review the results of the Empathy Map and identify the most important *needs, interests, issues, and concerns* of each adult life stage using the categories below. Record them on newsprint or create a report for everyone.

1. life stage issues (developmental needs, concerns, interests)
2. generational issues
3. milestones and life transitions
4. ethnic and cultural needs
5. spiritual and religious needs

Planning Step 4. Build the Adult Faith Formation Network Design

Begin building the adult faith formation network by determining the content areas appropriate for the target audience. Use the eight faith forming processes as the basic framework for the network, and then add new content areas to address missional – outreach, missional – pathways, adult life issues, adult life-stage role such as parents or grandparents.

Diagram your network on a sheet of newsprint. Be comprehensive even if it looks overwhelming. You can always combine content areas or modify them later in the process. Two examples follow to illustrate a faith formation network design – one for adults and one for families with children.

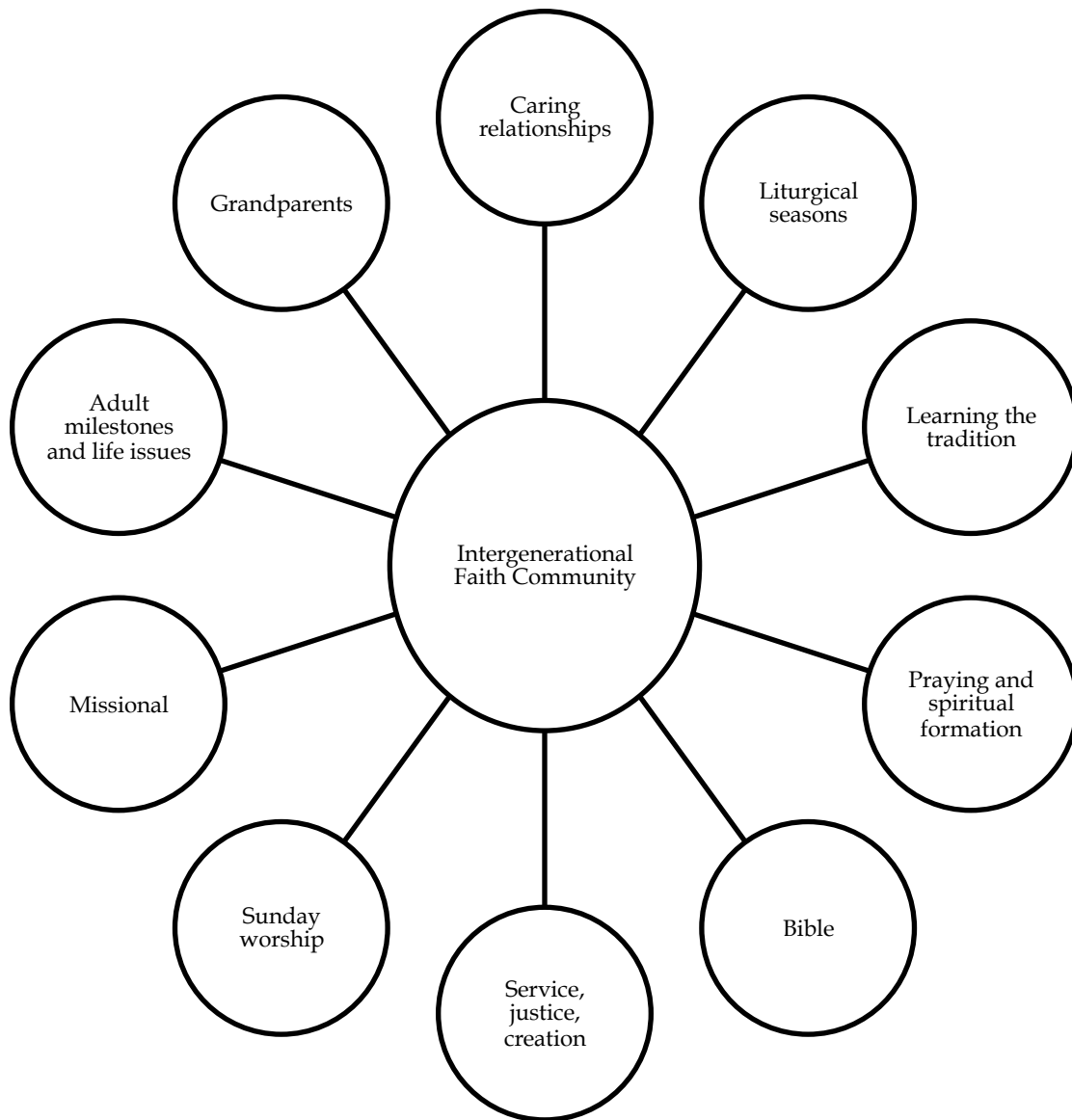
Building a Faith Formation Network

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 99.)

Example: Adult Faith Formation Network (Adults in their 50s–mid 70s)

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 102.)

The Adult Faith Formation Network incorporates the eight faith-forming process, combines celebrating rituals and milestones with adult life issues because of similar content, adds missional, life issues, and a life-stage role for grandparents.



Planning Step 5. Generate Programming for the Adult Faith Formation Network

With the network design set, programming can be added to each content area. Use the following process to generate programming ideas for each content area of the network. Generate a list of all the possible programs, activities, and resources that *could* be included in the network. This list becomes the database of ideas that can be used to develop each season of program for the network.

1. Correlate the most important needs from the research into the appropriate content areas of the adult network you have just created in Step 4. Some of the important needs will be included in multiple content areas. (See the results of Step 3.)

2. Add the faith formation programs that will continue to be offered for the target audience into the appropriate content areas of the adult network. Some programs may be listed more than once. (See the completed profile forms from Step 2.)
3. Add events, ministries, and programs from the intergenerational faith community into the appropriate content areas of the adult network. Some events/programs may be listed more than once. (See the completed profile form from Step 2.)

Use a large newsprint sheet to record information and to see the whole picture of network programming. It would also be easy to create an Excel spreadsheet with all of this information.

Generate new programming ideas.

Generate ideas for new programming for each content area on the adult network. Programs can be conducted in online spaces and physical places; in a variety of settings: on your own (self-directed), mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world; and with a variety of programs, activities, and resources – print, audio, video, and digital/online. Programming can be intergenerational utilizing the life, events, and ministries of the intergenerational faith community in adult faith formation.

Be sure to consider the variety of digital strategies in blended faith formation (see Chapter One for description). Adult faith formation can be *digitally-enabled* – blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and *digitally-connected* – linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media. You can use blended strategies in redesigning existing programming or in developing new programming.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 105.)

Use the following questions to help you generate ideas. Record the ideas on newsprint for all to see. Be sure to consult the ideas for adult faith formation in Chapter Eight of this book and online at www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

1. What new programming do we need to offer to address the needs that surfaced in our research?
2. What would our target audience like to see the church offer them through faith formation?
3. How can we address the audience's needs through age-specific programming?
4. How can we address the audience's needs through intergenerational or family programming?
5. How can we develop missional outreach programming and strategies to reach the "churchless" in our target audience?

Here's a creative alternative to simple brainstorming called, "What If" You Used Your Imagination?" The easiest way to begin is by saying: "I need fresh and novel ideas to solve my challenge. I will suspend all judgment and see what free and easy ideas we can think up. It doesn't matter how weird or offbeat they are." Allow your team the freedom to conceptualize without judging ideas in terms of the real world. Ask team members to list as many "what if" statements as they can on Post-it® notes (for example, "What if we developed a community café to reach people who are spiritual, but not involved in the church community?"). Ask them to complete the "What if..." statement personally, writing one statement per post-it. After several minutes, ask people to place their Post-it notes on a sheet of easel paper. Then cluster similar ideas together. When ideas are grouped based on common characteristics or themes, an organization and structure begins to arise from the information. More ideas are generated as people begin to see the structure and fill in the gaps. A sense of priority is often revealed as one or more of the clusters claim the energy and interest of the group.

Compile a complete report of potential programming.

Use the template below to compile a report of the results. This report presents all of the ideas from which seasonal plans can be designed: January–April, May–August, and September–December.

Target Audience:

Network content areas	Current programming in this content area	Intergenerational events/programs	New program ideas for this content area

Planning Step 6. Design a Season of Adult Faith Formation Programming

The most manageable way to program a faith formation network is to develop a three-season approach: January–April, May–August, and September–December. This means launching new programming three times and year and completing updating your website three times a year with the new programming, as well as recurring programming. (For an example of a season of programming for adults see the Adult Formation Network at the end of Chapter One. For an illustration of an adult network and website go to: <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>.)

All of the network content areas do not need to be introduced in the first season of programming. Over the course of a year (three seasons) network content areas and programming can be added so that the complete plan is finally implemented in the fourth season. Some of the programming will be consistent in every season, while other programming will be specific to a season. Programming from a completed season is archived online (on the website) so that it can be reused in another season or re-introduced a year later.

Here is a guide to developing one season of programming. Develop a first draft of the season and then review all of the programming and make final choices about what to include in the season. Use the template below and record the information on newsprint sheets to get a overall view of the season.

Seasonal Plan

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 108.)

Network Content Area	Programming & Dates			
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4

First, identify the season: January 1–May 1 or May 1–September 1 or September 1–January 1.

Second, add continuing adult programs to the seasonal plan. Use the seasonal plan template to record the results: list the network content areas and then add the programs to the appropriate month.

Third, add intergenerational events and programs that involve adults to the seasonal plan. .

Fourth, add new programming to the seasonal plan. Try to provide new (or current) programs in *different learning environments* and/or one program in multiple learning environments: on your own (self-directed), with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, in the community, in the world. Try to implement a program idea with a *blended (digital) faith formation* strategy: gathered program with online content, gathered program and online content, online and gathered in one program, mostly online, and fully online.

Fifth, develop the final version of the seasonal plan. Select the program ideas for each network content area. Some content areas may have too many programs to launch in one season. Select the ones that will be included in this season and save the other program ideas for another season.

Schedule programming in each network content area. Some of the programming flows through multiple months in a season, such as a weekly Bible study group. Some programs are monthly, while other programs are seasonal – Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter – and therefore anchored in one or more months. Still other programming/resources are always available, such as an online course or a video program or Bible study resources.

One way to manage the variety of programming is to focus on one month of major programming in the network content areas. For example the “Learning the Tradition” content area might select one month to schedule its theology enrichment series with four presentations from guest experts and options for small group study and online study using the video recordings. The Bible area might focus its programming in different month, perhaps around a church year season, such as Lent. This approach reduces the overlap among major programming and helps people participate in multiple experiences. See the example in Planning Step 7. (For an online example of this monthly approach view <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>.)

Final Plan for the Season

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 109.)

Network Content Area	Programming & Dates			
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4

Lastly, develop specific plans for each program. Include the following information:

- Date or month
- Learning environment(s)
- Digital strategy(s)
- Resources
- Leaders
- Cost

Planning Step 7. Build the Digital Platform—An Adult Faith Formation Website

Building a digital platform (website) is essential to the network approach to faith formation.

This digital platform provides the primary way to connect adults to the network's offerings and to connect adults with each other. A faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering the experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources of the network. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online. And it is available to people anytime, anywhere, and any device (computer, tablet, smart phone).

It is important to build a website dedicated to adult faith formation. There can be a website for each adult faith formation network, or a website that integrates all adults with specific sections for each adult life stage. Most church websites are not equipped for this task. They lack the features, ease-of-use, capacity, or focus on faith formation to become the digital platform for a network. Today it is much easier to develop a new dedicated website for adult faith formation and then link it to the church website.

Building a website is made much easier today by the availability of online website builders that provide predesigned website templates, drag-and-drop features to create webpages, and hosting for the website. Three popular website builders to explore are: *Weebly* (www.weebly.com), *Wix* (www.wix.com), and *Squarespace* (www.squarespace.com). All three have easy to use features and very reasonable subscription fees. For advanced users *WordPress* (<http://wordpress.org>) provides thousands of predesigned templates, lots of customization features, and ready-to-use apps. *WordPress* does require an understanding of web design and some programming ability.

Weebly, Wix, and Squarespace have detailed tutorials for designing a website. Go to their websites to view the tutorials. There are also independent websites with tutorials and how-to instructions for designing a website, some specific to these three website builders. There are dozens of websites created by *WordPress* users that are dedicated to providing assistance to designers. And, of course, there are YouTube videos that teach the basics of web design, and provide particular information for *Weebly, Wix, Squarespace, and WordPress*.

Here are several suggestions for web usability from Steve Krug's excellent and easy-to-use book *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, Third Edition (Berkeley: New Riders, 2014).

1. Don't make the user think – make web pages self-explanatory so the user hardly has any perceived effort to understand them, or example, clear choice of labels, clearly “clickable” items, simple search.
2. People generally don't read web pages closely; they scan, so design for scanning rather than reading.
3. Create a clear visual hierarchy and menu system (main menu, submenus).
4. Make it very clear how to navigate the site, with clear “signposts” on all pages.
5. Omit needless words.
6. The home page needs the greatest design care to convey site identity and mission.
7. Promote user goodwill by making the typical tasks easy to do, make it easy to recover from errors, and avoid anything likely to irritate users.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide step-by-step instructions for designing a website, there are specific features that can help customize a website design for the requirements of a adult faith formation network and the seasonal plan you have created.

First, choose a domain name (URL) for the adult faith formation website. The congregation can either purchase a new domain name for the faith formation website from one of the companies that sell and register domain names or use a free domain name provided by the website builder, e.g., *Weebly* provides hosting and a free website URL with the weebly.com extension, such as <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>.

Second, select a website template that is mobile-responsive, which means that the website will automatically size-itself correctly on a computer, laptop, tablet, or phone. The template should do this automatically.

Third, create the primary navigation (main menus) for the website directly from the network content areas. Be sure to select a website template that allows enough room for all of the menu items to be seen. Today's website design favors horizontal menus (running across the webpage), rather than vertical menus (running on the left side of the webpage). Select the template that provides enough room for the menus.

There may be a need to consolidate several content areas of the network to accommodate the website design template. This involves creating submenus (secondary navigation) under the main menu items. Here is an example of the Adult Faith Formation Network outlined previously using short titles that will fit across a webpage.

1. Worship
 2. Seasons
 3. Scripture
 4. Spirituality
 5. Study
 6. Discovering Faith
 7. Service
 8. Life Issues
 9. Grandparents
- (See the example at <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>.)

A well-designed site with clear and easy to understand navigation will increase engagement and the time people spend on the website.

Fourth, build each webpage to incorporate all of the programs, activities, and resources for the particular network content area in the seasonal plan. A well-designed site with quality content will increase engagement and create a positive experience for the user – all of which encourages continuous learning.

Each webpage includes content that is uploaded to the website for people to use – audio podcasts, videos, articles, blog posts, interactive features – as well as descriptions and links to programs, activities, and resources that reside on other websites, such as online courses. Webpages can include stable content that is going to be available in every season and seasonal or calendar-specific content.

Each webpage is a “learning page” where people can learn online, download resources, and connect to activities and resources across the web. Here are two examples of webpage design for an adult network from the online example: <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>

Adult Learning Page: November Scripture Enrichment

(Note: The following information on the November Scripture Enrichment is in the Reimaging book on page 113.)

Focus: Gospel of the New Lectionary Cycle beginning in Advent

Programming:

1. Three-session speaker series on major themes in the gospel: Thursday from 7:30–9:00 pm at the church center.
2. Video presentations of the three sessions online for self study.
3. Video presentations of the three sessions online for small group study with accompany study guide.
4. Scripture study groups using a four-session introduction to the major themes of the gospel conducted at church, in homes, and in the community.
5. Gospel self-study using links to Scripture websites such as www.enterthebible.org from Luther Seminary.
6. Online course on the gospel with one or more links to existing online courses at a seminary or university or on iTunes U in the Apple iTunes Store..

Adult Learning Page: Spiritual Formation

Programming:

1. Five-session spiritual practices course: Wednesday from 7 - 9 pm at the church center. Sessions include: Prayer Styles & Traditions, Fixed-Hour Prayer, Contemplation & Meditation, Spiritual Reading & Praying with Art and Music, Sabbath. Course book: *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* by Ruth Haley Barton (Intervarsity Press, 2006).
2. Video presentations of the five sessions online for self study.
3. Video presentations of the five sessions online for small group study with accompanying study guide.
4. "Book of the Month" Small Groups: *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, 2011).
5. "Take a Course or Make a Retreat with a Spiritual Master" – online at Spirituality&Practice.com
6. "Online Ignatian Retreat" from the University of Creighton
7. Links to resources for daily devotion for adults
8. Links to resources on prayer forms and styles for adults

Fifth, design the website specifically for your adult target audiences and write the content for them in their language with titles and examples that connect to their lives; select images (photo or short video) that reflect their life situations. Engage the target audience and tell them what they need to know and do.

Be sure to pay careful attention to the titles and descriptions so that they capture adults' interests. Develop descriptions that are positive in tone, indicate clearly the content or focus of an activity. Describe how your offerings respond to something within the lives of adults. Highlight the relationship between the content and the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of adults. Describe the 2-3 benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation.

Planning Step 8. Design a Process for Assessing and Personalizing Learning

An important component of a network approach to learning is giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. An adult faith formation network, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, can guide adults in creating their own personal learning pathways. Churches can develop processes for helping adults (online and in-person) to:

1. discern learning and faith growth needs
2. work with a mentor or guide to create a plan for faith growth and learning and find resources on the network
3. engage in faith formation experiences
4. reflect on their learning with a mentor/guide or small group
5. identify new needs for growth and learning

A *faith growth learning plan* helps adults 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. Congregations can provide mentors or guides to assist people in developing their growth plan, accessing the programs and resources that fit their plan, and evaluating their learning.

First, identify people who can serve as mentors or guides to help adults discern their learning needs; find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs; and assist with the implementation of the faith growth plan.

Second, design a discernment tool, specific to the adults, to guide adults in assessing their learning and faith growth needs. The discernment tool can be used in a group setting with a facilitator, in a one-one setting with a mentor or guide, or in an online setting with instructions for its use and how to find programs, activities, and resources to match with learning needs.

Third, design a faith growth learning plan worksheets and samples of completed plans. Give people a sense of the flow from discerning needs to finding resources on the network to implementing their plan. (For examples of assessment tools and faith growth plans go to www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.)

Planning Step 9. Test the Seasonal Plan and Web Design

It's wise to conduct one or two focus group meetings of the adult target audience to get feedback on the seasonal plan and the usability of the web design. Testing is an opportunity to learn more about the user through observation and engagement. (For insights on testing the web design see Chapter 9, "Usability Testing on 10 Cents a Day," in *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* (Third Edition) by Steve Krug).

Begin by identifying adults within the target audience to test the website and give feedback on the seasonal programming. Invite them to a focus group meeting. Use a deliberate procedure when you test. Create a "testing process" so that you can gain important feedback. Here are four suggestions:

1. Let your user experience the network online. Show; don't tell. Let them review the website and the programming. Just the minimum context so they understand what to do. (Have computers or tablets available for people to use or ask them to bring a device to the focus group.)
2. Have them talk through their experience. For example, when appropriate, ask "Tell me what you are thinking as you are doing this."
3. Actively observe. Watch how they use (and misuse!) the website. Don't immediately "correct" what your user is doing.
4. Follow up with questions, such as: "Show me why this would (or would not) work for you." "Can you tell me more about how this made you feel?" "Why?" "Do you find things that interest you and connect with your life?" "Are there things you would have liked to see?"

Based on the feedback from the focus group(s), determine what revisions to make in programming and website design. Consider inviting members of the focus group(s) to become reviewers throughout the season of programming. Stay in regular communication with them, asking for feedback on their experience of the website and the programming.

Planning Step 10. Launch the Adult Faith Formation Network

Generate ideas for promoting and introducing the faith formation network and website to members of the adult target audience – those active in the congregation church and those not participating in the congregational. Develop church-wide and targeted strategies for promotion.

In your promotional efforts be sure to describe how your offerings respond to something within the lives of adults. Highlight the relationship between the season of programming and the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of people. Describe the two to three benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation. Explain to people how to use the network and how to access the activities and resources.

Use as many promotional methods as you can. Consider the following ideas:

1. Ask those who are participating in church life and faith formation to invite their friends and colleagues. Ask people to use their social networks to promote the faith formation offerings.
2. Promote engagement online by connecting to (or extending from) a gathered event, program, or ministry.
3. Send email, text messages, and/or regular e-newsletters to targeted groups (use a service like Constant Contact or Mail Chimp or Flock Note).
4. Establish an adult faith formation Facebook page for network announcements, updates, stories, and photos from people engaged in faith formation.
5. Use Twitter to announce updates, events, and invite reflections from people on their experiences in the network.
6. Purchase targeted adds on Facebook and Twitter.
7. Provide ways to share experiences using blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram: videos, reports, photos, and so forth. Have a contest to encourage submissions and give a prize to the best photo, video, or report.
8. Have the pastor share the benefits and information of the adult faith formation network at Sunday worship.
9. Host information sessions after Sunday worship and other gathered programs to describe the adult faith formation network and how to use it.
10. Include information about the adult faith formation network in new member packets, baptism preparation materials, and other points of first-contact with adults. Send a personalized invitation to new members.
11. Promote the adult faith formation network at all gathered programs and events in the church.

Be sure to find ways to communicate the stories and examples of the benefits and blessings that are coming to adults and to the whole church community. Consider short video or audio

interviews of people who are engaged and then upload them to the church website and the faith formation website, as well as Facebook.

Planning Step 11. Evaluate Adult Faith Formation Programming

There are two essential times to evaluate programming: at the completion of a program or activity and at the end of a season of programming.


A *program evaluation* can be as simple as embedding an evaluation onto the website with individual programs and activities so that adults can complete an evaluation as soon as the program or activity concludes. It is also easy to develop an evaluation form on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and provide a link on the website to the online evaluation. SurveyMonkey compiles the results of the evaluation and produces a report of the results that can then be printed. (There are sample educational evaluation tools on SurveyMonkey that can be adapted.)

A *seasonal evaluation* reviews both programming and the website design and usability. The seasonal evaluation combines face-to-face evaluation meetings with online evaluation tools such as SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

For the *face-to-face seasonal evaluation*: gather small groups of people (12-20) who participated in programming and utilized the website. Conduct this activity *twice*: once to get feedback on the content of the network – what people participated in, and second for the design and usability of the faith formation network. Make a copy of the four-quadrant grid below on newsprint or a whiteboard to capture people’s feedback in four different areas. Draw a plus in the upper left quadrant, a triangle in the upper right quadrant, a question mark in the lower left quadrant, and a light bulb in the lower right quadrant.

- The upper left quadrant is for things people liked or found notable (in the programming and website).
- The upper right quadrant is for constructive criticism.
- The lower left quadrant is for questions that the experience raised in the lives of the people.
- The lower right quadrant is for ideas that the experiences spurred.

(Note: This chart is in the Reimaging book on page 118.)

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For *online seasonal evaluation*: Develop an evaluation form on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and provide a link on the faith formation website and church website to the online evaluation. Design the online evaluation in two sections: an evaluation of seasonal programming and an evaluation of the website design and usability. Be sure to have

people indicate if they did not participate in a program by adding a response to each question such as “did not participate.” Send an email to all those who participated in one or more programs and activities in the season and ask them to go online to complete the evaluation.

Here are a variety of evaluation questions that can be used to construct an evaluation form or a survey instrument. For a survey, try to limit the number of essay questions. People prefer the multiple choice/rating scales.

Sample Reaction Questions

How do participants react to the program, or better, what is the measure of their satisfaction?

1. What is your overall feeling after participating in this program/activity? (*Circle all that apply.*) Enthused, Astounded, Satisfied, Indifferent, Ambivalent, Encouraged, Uneasy, Threatened, Discouraged, Affirmed, Challenged, Enriched.
2. I was pleased by/with . . .
3. I was disappointed by/with . . .
4. One thing I found most helpful in this program/activity . . .
5. One of the biggest benefits from participating in this program/activity was . . .
6. This program/activity was . . . very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful, not at all helpful.
7. What recommendations would you make for improving the program?
8. Circle the number that best represents your evaluation of the program/activity. Use a rating scale of 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, and 4 – strongly agree *or* a rating scale of: 1 – not satisfied, 2 – somewhat satisfied, 3 – satisfied, 4 – very satisfied, and 5 – extremely satisfied.
 - I feel that I will be able to use what I learned.
 - The program/activity was interesting and engaging.
 - The program/activity encouraged participation, questions, and practical application.
 - The schedule and length of the program was appropriate.
 - The program/activity respected my learning style.
 - The program/activity offered a variety of learning activities and a variety of ways to learn.
 - The program/activity helped me apply my learning to daily life.
 - (Add specific features and content of the program/activity for people to evaluate.)

]Sample Application Questions

To what extent has learning occurred? This includes understanding the content presented, changing attitudes, developing behaviors, and so forth.

1. One way I can personally use what I learned from my participation in this program/activity is . . .
2. One way this program/activity had an impact on my life . . .
3. What understandings, skills, tools, or ideas do you have now that you did not have at the beginning of the program/activity?
4. List three actions you would like to undertake as a result of your participation in the program/activity.

5. As a result of your participation in this program/activity, what do you want to learn or do next?

Step 12. Design the New Season of Adult Faith Formation Programming

Using the ideas you have already generated the first time through the design process, the results from the evaluation, and the recommendations for improvement, design the new season of programming beginning at Step 6: Design a Season of Adult Faith Formation Programming.

Works Cited

Krug, Steve. *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* (Third Edition). Berkeley: New Riders, 2014.

Worksheets

All of the worksheets in this chapter can be found online in MS Word files for easy use: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.