

# Designing a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Adult Faith Formation Curriculum

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

1. [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com)
2. [www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com](http://www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com)
3. [www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com](http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com)
4. [www.intergenerationalfaith.com](http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com)
5. [www.curatingfaithformation.com](http://www.curatingfaithformation.com)
6. <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>
7. <http://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com>
8. [www.faithformationlearningexchange.net](http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net)
9. [www.weebly.com](http://www.weebly.com)
10. <http://vibrantfaithathome.org>

## Features of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Adult Faith Formation

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.

What if we reimagined adult faith formation as a *network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources* – in physical places and online spaces? An adult faith formation network is a way to offer wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences in online and physical settings. It offers faith formation content and experiences to respond to the diverse religious and spiritual needs of adults today – from the

spiritually committed and engaged to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. It enables congregations to become centers for adult learning and faith growth by utilizing the best of the new digital technologies to bring an abundance of meaningful and engaging faith forming experiences – in the congregation and the world, and in a variety of media – to all adults.

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).

## Online & Digitally-Enabled Adult Faith Formation

An adult faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering adult faith formation experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources; and for engaging people in learning and faith formation. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive providers of adult faith formation, but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to adults and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere. 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.

Adult faith formation can use blended models of faith formation to connect physical settings and online settings. The new digital tools, digital media, and online platforms connect adult participation in church life and events and in adult programs with their daily and home; and can reach adults at home, at work, and in daily life with personalized and customized faith formation content and experiences. Adult faith formation today can integrate online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

**Blended Faith Formation Continuum**

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

### Gathered with Online Content

We can design a gathered program using online content from websites, videos from YouTube or other video sites, and blogs and other social media. With an abundance of high quality digital content, this first option is the easiest way to bring the digital world into a gathered program.

### Gathered and Online Content

We can connect the events of church life (Sunday worship, church year seasons) and adult programs at church with online content that extends and deepens the experience of the adults through resources for learning, prayer, ritual, action, etc. For example: extend Sunday worship through the week using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings, sermon, and church year season; and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas,

conversation activities, and more. Or provide a forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life – delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website.

**Online and Gathered**

We can use the digital platform to provide the content that adults would learn in the gathered setting using print, audio, video, and more; and then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration. Imagine a Bible study program where the videos and print content were online and people gathered for reflection, discussion, and application; or develop an online center for justice and service where adults learn about justice issues, explore biblical and Christian teaching on justice, and then gather to engage in actions to address the justice issue. Imagine a catechumenal process (RCIA) in which the content of the Christian faith is online – in video and audio programs, articles and books, and more – and the gathered sessions focused on interaction, application, theological reflection, etc.

**Mostly Online**

We can offer opportunities for adults to learn online and provide opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings or in a web conference format. For example: offer online courses or video programs for adult self-study or small group study and gather the adults at the conclusion to share their insights with others who participated. Colleges, seminaries, and religious organizations provide an abundance of online courses, webinars, and video programs on variety of topics relevant to the lives of adults.

**Fully Online**

We can offer online-only faith formation by using existing courses, activities, print and e-books, audio and video programs, and content-rich websites. For example: offer adults a variety of online Bible and theology courses for individual study using online courses from colleges and seminaries, video programs on YouTube, online programs and webinars from religious organizations; or develop an online prayer and spirituality center where people can access daily prayer reflections and devotions, offer prayer intentions, pray for others, learn about spiritual practices, download prayer activities for the home, participate in an online retreat experience, and more.

<p><b>Adult Learning Website Page: Scripture Gospel of the New Lectionary Cycle</b></p>	<p><b>Adult Learning Website Page: Spiritual Formation</b></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Three-session speaker series on major themes in the gospel: Thursday from 7:30-9:00 pm at the church center.</li> <li>2. Video presentations of the three sessions online for self study.</li> <li>3. Video presentations of the three sessions online for small group study with accompany study guide.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>5. Gospel self-study using links to Scripture websites such as <a href="http://www.enterthebible.org">www.enterthebible.org</a> from Luther Seminary.</li> <li>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..</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Five-session spiritual practices course: Wednesday from 7 - 9 pm at the church center. Sessions include: Prayer Styles &amp; Traditions, Fixed-Hour Prayer, Contemplation &amp; Meditation, Spiritual Reading &amp; Praying with Art and Music, Sabbath. Course book: <i>Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation</i> by Ruth Haley Barton (Intervarsity Press, 2006).</li> <li>2. Video presentations of the five sessions online for self study.</li> <li>3. Video presentations of the 5 sessions online for small group study with study guide.</li> <li>4. “Book of the Month” Small Groups: <i>Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life</i> by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, 2011).</li> <li>5. “Take a Course or Make a Retreat with a Spiritual Master” – online at <a href="http://Spirituality&amp;Practice.com">Spirituality&amp;Practice.com</a></li> <li>6. “Online Ignatian Retreat” from the University of Creighton</li> <li>7. Links to resources for daily devotion</li> <li>8. Links to resources on prayer forms and styles</li> </ol>

## Designing a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Adult Faith Formation Curriculum

Faith-Forming Processes	Intergenerational	Young Adult	Midlife Adult	Mature Adult	Older Adult
<b>Caring relationships:</b> intergenerational and peer relationships, supportive communities					
<b>Celebrating the liturgical seasons:</b> feasts and seasons of the church year					
<b>Celebrating rituals and milestones:</b> celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones at significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey					
<b>Reading the Bible:</b> studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today					
<b>Learning the Christian tradition:</b> 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					
<b>Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation:</b> personal and communal prayer; being formed by the spiritual disciplines					
<b>Serving and justice:</b> 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					
<b>Worshipping God with the faith community:</b> experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission					
<b>Adult life issues and transitions</b>					
<b>Missional faith formation</b>					