

Archdiocese of Toronto 2019 Parish Ministry Conference

Faith Formation for All the Seasons of Life

John Roberto

Vibrant Faith Leadership Team (jroberto@lifelongfaith.com)

Handouts/Resources/PowerPoint Presentations:

<https://www.lifelongfaith.com/practices.html>

The catechetical documents of the Church call us to develop faith formation that engages the whole person: heart, mind, and hands. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (Mt 22:37-39) Jesus presented faith and discipleship as a whole way of life. How do we form people – children, youth, adults, and families – in this way of life today?

- Learn practices, approaches, and strategies for forming disciples at every stage of life and designing and teaching faith formation programs that are more holistic and engaging.
- Learn how to use the newest educational methods in our catechetical programs to engage people more fully in faith forming experiences.
- Discover how to integrate intergenerational relationships and faith experiences into faith formation for all ages; and how to make families and family faith formation part of everything we do.
- Discover how to incorporate digital methods and media into faith formation with all ages.

Part 1. Principles and Practices of Lifelong Faith Formation

1. Lifelong faith formation is a lifetime journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ.

Faith is a gift from God guided by the Holy Spirit and formed over time in our families, relationships, and church communities. Faith grows and matures over a lifetime as people come to know, love, and serve God.

The Christian faith is above all a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and a commitment to follow his way of life. Christian faith is living the holistic faith that Jesus taught, modelled, and made possible. Learning how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ is a lifelong process. Lifelong Christian faith formation guides people of all ages in developing a loving relationship with Jesus, embracing his Good News, and following him in their daily lives—becoming witnesses of God's reign in the world.

This type of faith formation is a **way of the head, the heart, and the hands**: *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (Mt 22:37-39, NRSV). Jesus presented faith as a whole way of life.

A way of the head demands a discipleship of faith seeking understanding and belief with personal conviction, sustained by study, reflecting, discerning and deciding, all toward spiritual wisdom for life. This requires that we educate people to know, understand, and embrace with personal conviction Christianity's core belief and values (*inform*).

A way of the heart demands a discipleship of right relationships and right desires, community building, hospitality and inclusion, trust in God's love, and prayer and worship. This requires that we foster growth in people's identity through a formative pedagogy and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community (*form*).

A way of the hands demands a discipleship of love, justice, peace-making, simplicity, integrity, healing, and repentance. This requires that we foster in people an openness to a lifelong journey of conversion toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and for the life of the world (John 6:51) (*transform*) (See Thomas Groome, 111–119).

2. Lifelong faith formation promotes maturity in faith through the ages and stages of life.

Lifelong faith formation promotes the maturing of faith over a lifetime—from the faith of young children (an experiencing style of faith), to the faith of children and adolescents (an affiliative, community-centered style of faith), to the faith of adolescents through adults (a searching, inquiry style of faith), toward the faith of adulthood (a maturing, personal style of faith).

To promote lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship churches focus on the most important characteristics of faith maturing. The following ten characteristics of faith maturing incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. They are drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research on what makes a difference in forming faith in people's lives across their life span. When taken together, these characteristics describe a person maturing in faith and describe the focus or goals of lifelong faith formation. They form the basis of helping people discern their faith journey and needs, and help the church accompany people through relationships, programs, activities, and resources.

Ten Characteristics of Maturing in Faith

1. Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ.
2. Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life.
3. Reading and studying the Bible, and its message, meaning, and application to life today.
4. Learning the Christian story and foundational teachings of one's particular Christian faith tradition and integrating its meaning into one's life.
5. Praying—together and by ourselves—and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines.
6. Living with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and values.
7. Living the Christian mission in the world—serving those in need, caring for God's creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace—locally and globally.

8. Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship and ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year.
9. Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the faith community.
10. Using one's gifts and talents in the Christian community and in the world.

With a lifelong vision of maturing faith a church can address each characteristic in developmentally-appropriate ways at each stage of life. The characteristics provide a way to direct energy and attention to specific goals or outcomes in faith maturing. They provide a way to develop a seamless process of fostering faith growth from birth through older adulthood.

In this approach, churches build faith formation experiences (programs, activities, resources) around the faith maturing characteristics and the spiritual-religious needs of people. For each characteristic we ask how we can guide people in. . . .

- Knowing and understanding more fully the Christian faith (informing)
- Developing and deepening their relationship with Jesus and the Christian community (forming)
- Living the Christian faith in every aspect of their lives (transforming)

This change of emphasis toward promoting faith maturing using the characteristics reflects a significant shift from a provider-centered, program- and content-driven approach to a **person-centered** approach to faith formation. Faith formation focuses on the characteristics of faith maturing, at each stage of life, and selects the content, experiences, programs, and methods that will promote growth in faith. The emphasis is on the person experiencing growth through the faith maturing characteristics. Everything is in service to people growing in faith and discipleship.

While this approach may sound self-evident, it is not. Too much faith formation is developed from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determine and deliver the content and programming irrespective of a vision of a person maturing in faith and the religious-spiritual needs and journeys of people.

We need to focus on people growing in faith and ask how can we accompany people relationally and programmatically. Instead of asking what program or resources we need or what content we need to teach, we focus on the person growing in faith.

3. Lifelong faith formation addresses the diverse spiritual and religious lives, engagements, and practices of children, adolescents, adults, and families.

We live in an era of increasing diversity in the religious practices, participation, and needs of children, adolescents, adults, and families. We know from research and experience that children, adolescents, adults, and their families represent at least four religious-spiritual identities:

1. People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community
2. People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives
3. People who are uninvolved in a church but are spiritual
4. People who unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion

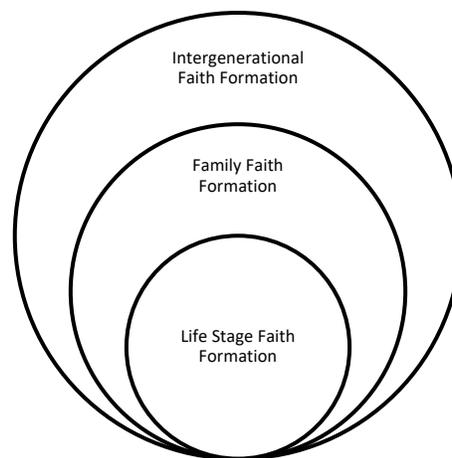
We can see three and even four of these identities reflected in people's participation in church life and faith formation programming. Parents who bring their children for baptism can reflect the whole spectrum from parents with a vibrant faith to parents who are unaffiliated but whose parents and grandparents are active in a faith community. Children participating in vacation Bible school come from families who reflect several of these religious-spiritual identities. Adolescents participating in a confirmation program often reflect three or four of these identities.

1. ***People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.*** For these people religious faith is central to their lives. These are people of all ages who are spiritually committed and growing in their faith within a church community. These are people who have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. They are living their faith in daily life, at home, and in the world. Churches are challenged to provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, at home and at church, that develops vibrant faith, is continuous throughout life, and engages all people in the life and mission of the church community
2. ***People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives.*** These are people who participate occasionally in church life—Sunday worship, seasonal celebrations, community events, and age-group programs. They may participate in significant seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, and celebrate sacraments and milestone events, such as marriage and baptism. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to church programs. For parents transmitting a religious faith often means bringing their children to educational programs at church, and participating because of their children. For “Occasionals” their spiritual commitment is not central to the way they live their lives and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, they do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment. Churches are challenged to develop faith formation that begins with the spiritual life and level of engagement of “Occasionals.”
3. ***People who are uninvolved in a church but are spiritual.*** These are people who are often called “spiritual but not religious.” Many of these people are “Dones” who have left church after decades of participation and often leadership roles within the church. Many believe in God and have a relationship with God, and are growing spiritually. Many practice their Christian faith unattached to a faith community or tradition. Many are spiritually hungry and searching for God and a life of meaning and purpose. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service, or in online spiritual resources and communities. Parents, though not involved in a church, may send their children to church programs; and the parents may participate at times with their children. Churches are challenged to become more missional—reaching people where they live (in-person and online), building relationships, engaging in spiritual conversations, offering programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth in home or community settings, and inviting them to consider participation in a church community.

4. **People who unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.** These are the “Nones.” They no longer believe religion is important in their lives. They experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The unaffiliated reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially young adults in their 20s and 30s. Many parents today are “first generation Nones” and are raising their children in religiously uninvolved and unaffiliated homes creating a “second generation of Nones.” Many leave organized religion because they stopped believing in the religion’s teachings (usually a top reason), or because their family was never that religious when they were growing up, or because of their experience of negative religious teaching about or treatment of LGBTQ people (*Exodus*, 2016). Churches are challenged to find ways to move out into the world and cultures of the unaffiliated, build relationships, and be witnesses to the Christian faith in the world today. Churches are challenged to develop strategies and approaches for moving faith formation from the church into the community and online.

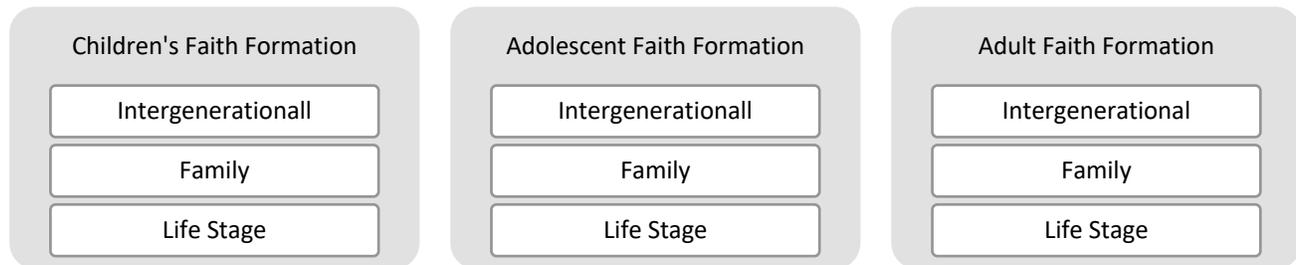
4. Lifelong formation is holistic—integrating three primary faith forming environments: the church community, the family, and life stages

Lifelong faith formation integrates three primary environments—the church community, the family, and the life stage/peer group—to promote maturing in faith by engaging all ages in *intergenerational* relationships, activities, and church life and events (including Sunday worship), equipping and supporting *parents* and the whole *family* in sharing and practicing their faith at home, and engaging *each life stage* in activities and experiences designed to address their religious and spiritual journeys, life stage needs, and the ways they learn and grow.



Children, adolescents, and adults need to experience the faith forming influence of all three environments each year. Faith formation at each stage of life blends intergenerational, family, and age group settings into a holistic approach to faith formation. This reflects a significant shift from the age-segregated or siloed approach where faith formation with children, adolescents, and adults is primarily age-group-only without significant intergenerational and family faith forming experiences. This shift situates people within a broader “ecology” of faith formation and a more holistic approach to faith formation.

At each stage of life people experience faith forming experiences with the whole community (intergenerational), with the whole family, and with their life stage (peer) groups. Faith formation at each stage of life blends intergenerational, family, and age group settings into a holistic approach to faith formation, centered around the ten characteristics of maturing in faith. This reflects a significant shift from the age-segregated or siloed approach where faith formation with children, adolescents, and adults is primarily age-group-only without significant intergenerational and family faith forming experiences.



5. Lifelong faith formation creates networks that address the life tasks, spiritual and religious needs, and interests of families and all ages by offering a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources in multiple settings, aided by the use of digital platforms, media, and methods.

We live in the age of networks. We are all part of networks: our families, our schools, our workplaces, our religious churches, our social circles. Networks—collections of people (and their resources) connected to each other through relationships—aren't new. They are as old as human society. Over the past two decades, facilitated by digital technology and tools, societies have become more connected. Network thinking and design now permeates social life. Increasingly education is being viewed and designed as a network of learning resources—people, experiences, content, activities, and more—fashioned around the learning needs of people.

Churches can now design networks of formation for children, adolescents, adults, and families. Networks of faith formation move us from a provider-centered, program-driven model to a learner-centered model where the content and experiences are designed around the people and where they have control over their learning. In a network model, faith formation shifts from “one size fits all” curriculum and programming to a variety of religious content and experiences that connect with people’s spiritual and religious needs.

Individuals and families have an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along personal trajectories of faith growth. A faith formation network provides a church with a means to offer relevant content that addresses the spiritual and religious needs of people and the ability for them to engage with that content in ways that reflect how they learn and grow best. A network approach provides more options for people of all ages to find programs, activities, and resources that match well with how they learn and grow in faith.

A network approach address the whole person and how they learn best by offering programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different ways to learn (“intelligences”): word-centered, verbal-linguistic, logical, musical, visual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and bodily-

kinesthetic (see the work of Howard Gardner). It also offers different styles of learning: direct, hands-on, concrete experiences; reflective observation; exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts; and active experimentation with new knowledge and practices. A network approach can provide multiple activities and resources for a topic or them that reflect different ways to learn and different styles of learning.

A network approach personalizes faith formation around the life tasks and issues, interests, and religious and spiritual needs of families and individuals at all stages of life. Churches can offer a wide diversity of programs, activities, and resources that incorporate a variety of ways to learn—on your own, with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the church, and in the community and world—delivered in physical gathered settings and online settings. Faith formation becomes personal, portable, and participatory—the key characteristics of learning in the network age.

A network approach utilizes the abundance of church community resources (people, ministries, events, and activities) and religious content in print and digital formats—audio, video, apps, e-books, websites, social media. Faith formation as a network benefits from the rise of online resource centers with freely accessible, high quality religious content and experiences that churches, families, and individuals can access.

A network approach enables churches to become centers of lifelong learning and faith growth for all people by utilizing the best of the new digital technologies to bring an abundance of meaningful and engaging faith-forming experiences in a variety of environments and media to people of all ages.

In summary a network approach to lifelong faith formation has several distinct features:

1. It provides a *variety* of content, programs, activities, and resources to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of families, children, adolescents, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.
2. It is developed in *multiple settings*: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community and world, and online—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.
3. It addresses the *whole person* and how people learn best by offering programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different ways to learn (multiple intelligences: word-centered, verbal-linguistic, logical, musical, visual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and bodily-kinesthetic); and different styles of learning (direct hands-on experiences, reflective observation, exploration and analysis, and active experimentation).
4. It *personalizes* faith formation by giving people an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth.
5. It utilizes the *abundance* of spiritual-religious content that is available in print, audio, video, digital, and online formats.
6. It is built on a *digital platform* that integrates all of the content (programs, activities, resources), connects people to the content and to each other, provides continuity for people across different learning experiences, and is available anytime, anywhere. The digital platform provides for seamless learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or

settings; and provides continuity between faith formation in the church, at home, in daily life, and online.

6. Lifelong faith formation guides individuals and families in discerning their spiritual and religious journeys and life stage needs, and giving people an active role in shaping their own personal trajectories of faith growth.

Lifelong faith formation provides *personalized and customized* learning and faith growth, giving children (and their parents), adolescents, adults, and families an active role in shaping their own growth in faith and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Personalizing faith formation means tailoring faith formation around people’s spiritual-religious journeys and life stage needs and interests. We know from learning sciences research that more effective learning will occur if each person receives a customized learning experience. People learn best when they are placed in a learning environment that is sensitive to their learning needs and flexible enough to adapt strategies and resources to individual needs.

Personalized learning means tailoring the educational environment—the what, when, how and where people learn—to address the individual needs and interests of each person. Giving power to individuals and families to shape their own learning does not mean abandoning them to their own devices. Churches 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. A faith formation network, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, provides the resources necessary for helping people of all ages create their own faith growth plans.

Personalizing faith formation is a way to address the increasingly diverse spiritual-religious identifies of people today by providing variety and choice in faith formation programming, activities, and resources around the lives of people.

One way to personalize faith formation utilizes a *Pathways Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs, using the characteristics of faith maturing, and then provides *Playlists* of content, experiences, and activities to address those needs. The *Pathways Guide* incorporates a rating scale for discerning faith growth needs, for example: Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper. *Playlists* of content and experiences are developed for each faith maturing characteristic with activities targeted to each rating on the discernment continuum (getting started, growing, going deeper). There are *Playlists* for each “level” on the continuum. *Playlists* incorporate a variety of programming including gathered programs at church, small groups, online learning and resources, mentoring, and more. The *Playlists* are published on a digital platform to make it easy for people to access them.

A second approach to personalizing faith formation, when you cannot use a *Pathways Guide* with people, is to offer a variety of content, experiences, and activities developed around the ten characteristics of faith maturing or the content; and then invite people to select the activities that best address their spiritual and religious needs (getting started, growing, going deeper). In this approach the *Playlists* provide the way to personalize faith formation. For example, to help people read and study the Bible, there are three different types of Bible content and experiences for those who are getting started, growing, and going deeper. These activities can be online, gathered, small group, family-

centered, and more. All of the content and experiences are published on a digital platform for people to access.

7. Lifelong faith formation includes missional outreach to the spiritual-religious needs and journeys of the “spiritual but not religious” and the “unaffiliated,” and creating pathways to experience the Christian faith, encounter Jesus Christ, and embrace the Good News.

Missional faith formation involves expanding and extending the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live. It involves developing targeted approaches and strategies designed around the particular needs and life situations of the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. The setting for these new initiatives often moves from the church to the community, homes, coffee shops, online communities, and more.

Missional faith formation involves providing pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus Christ, embrace the Good News, and make the Christian faith a way of life in a supportive faith community. This involves developing intentional approaches that move people from discovery to exploration to commitment. One example of this process is an “Introduction to the Christian Faith” program—an opportunity for people to investigate the claims of the Christian faith in an informal, no pressure, nonjudgmental, and friendly environment (such as the Alpha Course). The emphasis is upon exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal setting and does not assume any background knowledge or belief in Christianity. It can offered in a variety of settings, formats, and times.

8. Lifelong faith formation incorporates digital methods and media to enhance and expand the ways people of all ages grow in faith.

The digital transformation is making possible new approaches for developing lifelong faith formation, such as the network approach, and enhancing existing faith formation activities. The digital possibilities are almost endless:

1. Learning and faith formation are now mobile—anytime, anyplace, 24x7. People have the digital devices to stay connected and to access learning and faith formation on the go. We can “program” faith formation experiences around people’s interests and time.
2. There is abundance of high quality digital content for faith formation—audio, video, print, websites, apps, online learning platforms, and more.
3. New digital media and learning methods provide multiple ways to learn and grow—activities and experiences that reflect different learning styles and multiple intelligences.
4. Digital media and online activities, especially videos, mean that we can develop content in smaller units (micro-learning) that better suit today’s learners who have shorter attention spans.
5. A faith formation website can serve as a hub for faith formation—an online learning center, a portal to activities and resources, and a connecting point for people.
6. Online classrooms, like Edmodo, Schoology, and Google Classroom, provide safe spaces for people to engage in faith forming experiences and interaction.

7. The abundance of content and digital methods, media, and platforms provide the tools necessary to personalize the faith formation experience for children, adolescents, adults, and families.
8. Faith formation programming can be *digitally-enabled* by blending gathered events, experiences, and programming with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation

Lifelong faith formation uses blended models of faith formation to connect physical settings and online settings. The new digital tools, digital media, and online platforms connect people's participation in church life, events, and programs with their daily and home—and can reach people of all ages at home, at work, and in daily life with personalized and customized faith formation content and experiences. 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.

Digital Faith Formation Strategies

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

Part 2. Learning Today

New research into how we understand learning and the most effective processes and methods to foster learning provide churches with new approaches and tools to use in fostering faith formation at each stage of life.

1. Motivation

First, learning is a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual. Motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning.

The traditional model of schooling conditioned people to perceive the proper role of learners as being dependent on teachers to make decisions for them as to what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it has been learned. Today people are accustomed to 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.

As learning becomes a process of active inquiry, where the initiative resides within the person, intrinsic motivation becomes a key factor in determining whether or not people will engage in faith formation, and open themselves to learning and faith growth. Extrinsic motivation in faith formation, such as requirement policies for programs, rarely motivates people to participate, learn, or grow in faith. Sometimes they have the opposite effect.

Drawing on decades of scientific research on human motivation, Daniel Pink in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* exposes the mismatch between what research shows and how we motivate people. While carrots and sticks (policies and requirements) worked somewhat successfully in the twentieth century assembly line model, that's precisely the wrong way to motivate people today.

Motivation 1.0 presumed that humans were biological creatures, struggling for survival. Motivation 2.0 presumed that humans also responded to reward and punishments in their environment. Motivation 3.0 presumes that humans also have a third drive—to learn, to create, and to better the world. It is this third type of Motivation that drives people to be self-directed and engage in learning as a process of active inquiry. Motivation 3.0 has three essential elements:

- *Autonomy*: the desire to direct our own lives. People need autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), team (who they do it with), and technique (how they do it).
- *Mastery*: the urge to get better and better at something that matters. Motivation 3.0 demands engagement. Only engagement can produce mastery—becoming better at something that matters. Mastery demands deliberate practice.
- *Purpose*: the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves. Humans, by their nature, seek purpose—a cause greater and more enduring than themselves.

Daniel Pink writes, “The secret to high performance and satisfaction—at work, at school, and at home—is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world.”

2. Learning Methods

Second, the ways people learn today are changing. Among today's most promising educational innovations are blended learning, micro-learning, immersive learning, project-based learning, and collaborative learning. All of these new approaches and methods are enhanced by the use of digital technologies, methods, and media.

Blended Learning integrates learning in physical and online settings where a person has some control over time, place, path, and/or pace of the learning experience. One form of blended learning is Flipped Learning in which the content moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space (usually online), and the group space is transformed into an interactive learning environment for

discussion and application. Churches are already flipping confirmation preparation (learning online plus interactive group activities in gathered settings), extending gathered events with online content for continued learning, and providing online faith formation or live webinars for individuals or groups.

Micro-learning experiences are short-form—5, 10, 15 minute—learning experiences designed for anywhere, anytime learning that be combined into multi-part learning programs. Micro-learning experiences are one response to short attention spans and mobile learning. Churches can curate a series of micro-learning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content.

With the rise of anytime, anywhere faith formation content we need to ask what is the role of gathering people for faith formation. Today people can access online most of the content that we teach at church. One response to this new situation is to focus gathered activities on creating **Immersive Learning**—faith-forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. Churches have already been offering these types of experiences—vacation Bible school, retreats, mission trips, and more. Churches can design or re-design gathered programming into immersive faith formation using extended settings (half-day, full day, weekend, weeklong) offered throughout the year (but not weekly).

Project-based learning involves completing complex tasks that typically result in a realistic product, event, or presentation. Project-based learning is 1) organized around driving questions that lead young people to encounter central concepts or principles; 2) focused on a constructive investigation that involves inquiry and knowledge building; 3) learner-driven, in that the young people are responsible for making choices and for designing and managing their work; and 4) authentic, by posing problems that occur in the real world and that people care about.

Collaborative learning involves young people in small, non-competitive groups where they can discuss and process together what they are learning, work together on projects and activities, and practice and present what they are learning. Learning spaces are organized for learners' participation in a "learning community"—recognizing that learning takes place in a social context and relies on communication and interaction with others. Gen Z learns best in an environment where they can share with and co-create their education with their peers. Collaborative learning requires creating an environment that is safe, caring, accepting, and trustworthy so that young people feel free to share, discuss, question, and apply.

Multiple ways of learning addresses the eight multiple intelligences into learning experiences, providing a greater variety of ways for young people to learn: verbal-linguistic (word smart, book smart), logical-mathematical (number smart, logic smart), visual-spatial (art smart, picture smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body smart, movement smart), musical-rhythmic (music smart, sound smart), naturalist (nature smart, environment smart), interpersonal (people smart, group smart), and intrapersonal (self-smart, introspection smart). While not every program can incorporate activities for all eight intelligences, having a greater variety of ways to learn promotes more effective learning and engages teens more fully in the learning experience.

Multisensory learning means utilizing all of the senses in a learning experience where young people can taste, smell, touch, and hear things related to the topic of the session. Gen Z thinks of the world as a canvas to paint with words, sights, sounds, video, music, web pages, and anything they can create. Multimedia means using multiple modalities to engage young people. They are also a generation of “content creators” who live to create, and given the chance to do so they will merge multiple media into one complex but comprehensive whole.

Visual learning guides young people in learning to “read” or interpret visual images and how to use visual images to communicate. Visual literacy includes: 1) interpreting, understanding, and appreciating the meaning of visual images, 2) communicating more effectively by applying the basic principles and concepts of visual design, 3) producing visual images using computers and other technologies, and 4) using visual thinking to conceptualize solutions to problems.

Practice-oriented learning means incorporating real-life application activities into the learning experience. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it. Research is demonstrating that young people learn more deeply when they apply knowledge to real-world problems and when they take part in projects that require sustained engagement and collaboration.

Storytelling makes learning stick. Tell relevant stories, present case studies and show examples. Talk about your own mistakes and your own successes. Allow young people to respond to stories and case studies. Let them exchange stories with each other.

3. Generational Learning

Every generation has preferred ways of learning. We know today’s younger generations learn best in environments that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. While, older adults often learn best in a setting where is a lecture or expert presentations. Life stage faith formation designs faith forming experiences using methods and approaches appropriate to each generation.

Builders (older adults)

- lecture and expert presentations
- activities that take into account their age-related abilities to hear, see, and move
- connect their experience to the topic
- structure and predictability (no surprises); low-risk learning environment
- independent skill practice time
- still like printed resources and books for study

Boomers (mature adults)

- group interactions and discussions
- storytelling
- chances to try new skills independently
- stable, risk-free environment but want to interact with others
- experiential, practical, and fun activities that allow for team exercises
- use technology as means for learning
- blend of people who prefer printed books and those who learn online

Gen Xers (midlife adults)

- learn by doing
- experiential with lots of direct experience activities
- shorter, episodic learning experiences
- visual learning (images, videos)
- practical and relevant (What will I do with this learning?)
- discretion to complete tasks their own way
- prefer independent self-directed learning, including individual projects
- use technology where possible, including online learning, video, etc.
- will turn to digital resources over the printed resources

Millennials (young adults)

- microlearning and episodic learning experiences
- lots of activity-based group work
- fast-moving, interactive activities
- visual learning (images, videos)
- technology enabled learning using their own devices for learning
- collaborative learning environments with peer interaction
- entertainment and learning at the same time

Gen Z (children and adolescents)

- authentic and meaningful experiences
- more independent in how they learn; self-reliant; self-directed learners
- adept at using the new digital tools and methods to learn
- value face-to-face interaction and collaboration, sharing and co-creating with peers
- project-based learning, active learning, and activities that utilize their creativity, such as artwork, video presentation, and more
- videos and YouTube, especially short pieces that run from sixty to ninety seconds

4. Multiple Environments for Learning and Faith Formation

Faith formation incorporates seven learning environments, in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. The seven environments provide a way to offer a diversity of programs in different learning environment, as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments—all of which provides people with more options to participate in faith formation and broadens the scope of faith formation offerings. A variety of learning methods can be used with each of these seven learning environments. Creating this variety of learning environments is aided by the development of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the faith formation offerings.

1. **Independent (on your own, self-directed)** programming provides maximum flexibility for the person—when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7

approach to faith growth and learning for busy people. Churches can serve as guide to helping people find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs, and then deliver that programming online at the church's faith formation website.

2. **Mentoring** provides a one-to-one relationship for faith formation that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or for those who want to explore Jesus and Christianity after leaving church earlier in life. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring older adults on the use of digital tools and media.
3. **At Home** programming provides individuals and whole families with faith formation programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life, and delivered through a faith formation website. This can include a wide variety of digital media and online programs and resources, such as online learning programs, resources for the church year seasons, Sunday worship resources, online communities and support groups, and links to online faith formation resources and resource centers.
4. **Small Group** programming provides an excellent way to address the diversity of needs by organizing a variety of small groups with each one targeted to a particular need or topic. Small groups also provide lots of flexibility in schedule and location. Groups can meet at times and places that best fit their lives, such as group that meets for breakfast weekly at the local restaurant or for coffee at a local coffee shop. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the church to sponsor small group programs. Churches leaders can provide resources, support, and training for leaders, thereby enabling people to organize their own small groups. Small group programming learning can take many different forms including:
 - Discipleship or faith sharing groups or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological formation study groups, theme or issue oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith sharing groups, book study groups
 - Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups and service/faith in action groups
 - Support groups such as parent groups, caregiving groups, life transition groups
 - Ministry groups involved in leadership in the church and world

Study-action small groups combine study with an experiential hands-on action project . One type of study-action model focuses on engaging people in the ministry of justice and service, weaving together study, small group learning, retreat experiences, and action projects. A second type of study-action model involves ministry or leadership groups that prepare for their particular ministry or leadership role through study accompanied by actual involvement in their ministry or leadership role. This type of learning involves a continuous cycle of study-action-study-action, as the involvement in action generates new learning needs.

5. **Large Group** programming provides a way to serve a large number of people on topics that appeal to a wide audience. Here is a sampling of large group programming:
 - Multi-session programs

- One-session program, such as a monthly session on a theological topic
 - Speaker series, such as a multi-evening or multi-week program focused on a particular theme
 - Parent parallel learning program at the same time as their children’s program
 - Workshops targeted to specific life issues
 - Film festivals that explore key religious, spiritual, and life-task themes
 - Field trips, such as visiting an art museum or attending a musical or theatrical performance
 - Retreat experiences in an evening, one-day, or weekend format at church or at a retreat center
 - Intergenerational programs for all ages in the church
6. **Churches** programming focuses on the events already present in the life of the church: Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, sacramental and ritual celebrations, works of justice and acts of service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of an individual church. Faith formation can provide experiences for people to *prepare*—with the appropriate knowledge and practices—for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith; and to *guide* their *participation* and *reflection* upon those events. Churches programming includes leadership and ministry in the church and to the world—providing the opportunity for faith formation to prepare people for leadership and ministry, and to reflect upon their engagement.
7. **Community and World** programming provides a way for churches to utilize existing programs and activities outside the church as part of a faith formation plan. This involves researching the resources and programs being offered locally in the community (programs, courses, clinics, workshops, presentations, and more) at community colleges and universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, and more; and nationally/globally through national organizations, religious organizations, online resource centers, and more. This is an important environment for developing initiatives for serving, working for justice, and caring for creation. Many organizations—locally, nationally, and globally—have already created programs that be adopted by the church.

5. Digital Methods

1. **Extend Programming:** We can extend gathered events and programs into people’s daily lives by providing online content that helps people to go deeper. For example, we can extend Sunday worship into the home and daily life with daily Bible readings, prayer activities, learning activities, faith conversations, and more. We can extend an age group program with online activities that deepen knowledge and provide application activities or projects. We can extend intensive programs like VBS or camp or retreats with regular online content and activities.
2. **Flip Programming:** We can “flip the classroom or program” by creating a digital platform to provide the content that people would learn in the gathered setting in an online learning space using print, audio, video, and more. And then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration. We can redesign children’s faith formation so that children and their parents are learning online at home and doing activities together, and then refocusing “class time” to engage children in creating projects and activities that demonstrate their learning.

We can design a high school confirmation program that provides the content that used to be taught in the weekly sessions in an online platform for individual learning—watching videos, reading short materials, and writing a reflection journals; engages the young people in small groups during the month to discuss their online learning; and then meets monthly in a large group gathered session for discussion, interactive activities, and application of the content to living as a Christian today. During the year retreats, worship, and service projects offer additional gathered sessions.

3. **Online Programming:** We can develop a complete online faith formation experience with faith forming content and experiences. For example we can build an online “forty-day Lenten curriculum” that connects the Lent events at church with online content for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life. We can include prayer activities, daily Bible readings, daily devotions, Lent study resources, videos, service activities, and more.

We can use video conferencing with services like Zoom to create webinar programming, such as a monthly one-hour parent formation webinar program delivered to parents at home. We can build the program around the knowledge, skills, and practices for effective parenting and for parent as faith formers. Invite a guest presenter and invite parents to participate online. Sponsor two or three parent dinners during the year (with babysitting) for parents to gather in-person to meet each other, discuss the webinars, etc.

We can also set up online faith formation centers with resources for people to access 24x7. For example, we can providing an online prayer and spirituality center where people can access daily prayer reflections and devotions, offer prayer intentions, pray for others, learn about spiritual practices, download prayer activities for the home, and more.

4. **Multiple-format Programming:** We can develop multiple formats for gathered programs by recording programs (audio and video) and then developing small group and independent programming using the video or audio content. Produce a webpage with the video or audio content and the programming for small groups and independent learning. Use social media (like a Facebook group) or an online classroom to facilitate online interaction and discussion. This provides a great way to offer other ways for people who cannot participate in the fixed time program to access the content and engage in learning at a time that works best for them.
5. **Prepare and Follow-Up Programming:** We can utilize online formats to prepare people for an event or program, such as the celebration of a sacrament or milestone, or participation in a mission trip. This is an especially helpful process when it is difficult to gather people for the preparation and/or follow-up. Use the online platform to *prepare* people for the event with the appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources). *Engage* people in the event or program. Use the online platform to *sustain and apply* the learning and growth with appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources). Use social media (like a Facebook group) or an online classroom (like Edmodo or Google Classroom) to facilitate online interaction and discussion.

9



Fundamental Digital Skills for 21st Century Teachers



Record and edit audio clips

- 1- Soundcloud.com
- 2- Audioboom.com
- 3- Vocaroo.com
- 4- Clynx.it



Create interactive video content

- 1- Youtube Video Editor
- 2- Wevideo.com
- 3- Magisgto.com
- 4- Animoto.com



Create infographics and posters

- 1- Piktochart.com
- 2- Canva.com
- 3- Drawings.google.com
- 4- Thinglink.com

Create PLNs, connect, discover new content, and grow professionally

- 1- Twitter.com
- 2- Facebook.com
- 3- Plus.google.com
- 4- LinkedIn.com



Use blogs and wikis to create participatory spaces for students

- 1- Blogger.com
- 2- Wordpress.com
- 3- Edublogs.org
- 4- wikispaces.com



Create engaging presentations

- 1- Docs.google.com/presentation
- 2- Haikudeck.com
- 3- Zoho.com/docs/show.html
- 4- Prezi.com

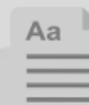
Create digital portfolios

- 1- Web.seesaw.me
- 2- Silk.co
- 3- Sites.google.com
- 4- Weebly.com



Curate, organize and share digital resources

- 1- Diigo.com
- 2- Scoop.it
- 3- Educlipper.net
- 4- Edshelf.com



Create digital quizzes

- 1- Flipquiz.me
- 2- Riddle.com
- 3- Quizalize.com
- 4- Testmoz.com



www.educatorstechnology.com

Adopting New Learning Methods in Faith Formation

Use the **Adopting New Learning Methods** worksheet to examine how you use the ten practices of 21st century learning in faith formation. How often do you use these ten practices in faith formation programming (1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Almost always, 5 = Always)? How do you use the new practices?

Be sure to identify the ways that you use the new practices in your church. After you have completed your analysis, explore how you can incorporate twenty-first century learning practices in faith formation. Identify programs or activities that are in need of attention. Use the following questions to help you redesign a program or activity.

- Which of the ten learning practices are already incorporated into your ministry?
- Which of the ten learning practices do you want to incorporate in a program or activity?
- What would a redesigned program or activity look like?
- How can you implement the redesigned program?
- How could you transform your ministry to incorporate one or more of these practices?

Blended learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Micro-learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Immersive learning environments How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Multiple ways of learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Multisensory learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Project-based learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Collaborative learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Visual learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Practice-oriented learning How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
Storytelling How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5

Part 3. Ideas for Intergenerational Programming

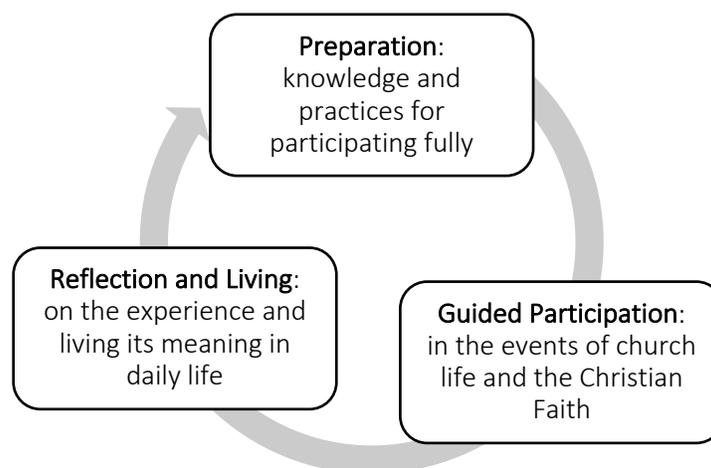
1. Utilize the Intergenerational Events and Experiences of Church Life

Every church already has events and experiences that can be enhanced and strengthened to unlock their faith forming potential.

- *The feasts and seasons of the church year* provide a natural rhythm and calendar for fashioning faith formation for children, adolescents and the whole family: Advent and Christmas, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Easter season, Pentecost, and many more throughout the year.
- *Sunday worship and the Scripture readings* (lectionary or sermon series) provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its cycle of weekly Scripture readings.
- *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life.
- *Acts of service and justice*—locally and globally—provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teaching on service, justice, and care for the earth.
- *Prayer and spiritual traditions* provide times for reflection, praying as a community, and living the practices of the spiritual life through the community's life together
- *Churches events* that originate within the life and history of an individual church, and celebrate and reinforce the church's identity and mission

In order to tap into the power of these events, faith formation can be fashioned around the event using a simple three-step methodology:

1. *Prepare* people—intergenerationally or in age groups—with the knowledge and practices—for participating in the event, experience, or activity,
2. *Experience/participate* in the intergenerational event , experience, or activity
3. *Reflect* upon the meaning of the event and discover how to *live/practice* that learning in daily life



This method can easily be incorporated in a variety of faith formation settings—intergenerational programming, family-centered programming, and/or age group programming. Consider the possibilities of making church life and events your faith formation curriculum throughout the year.

- People prepare for Sunday worship and rehearse the Scripture readings; they experience Sunday worship with the faith community; and they are equipped to live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives (with activities and resources delivered online).
- People learn about the a particular justice issues and the biblical and church teachings on the justice issue; they experience action to serve those in need, work for justice, and care for creation—locally and globally; and they reflect on that experience and integrate its meaning into their lives as Christians.
- People learn about the Bible and how to read it, interpret it, and apply it to their lives; they experience the Bible at Sunday worship and in the life of the community; and develop their own practice of Bible study and reading.
- People learn about Jesus by studying the Gospels; they experience the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus through the seasons of the church year; and they reflect upon their understanding of Jesus and how to follow him.
- People learn about prayer and spirituality and how to develop their spiritual lives through prayer and spiritual disciplines; they experience the prayer life of the faith community; and they are equipped to develop their own practice of prayer and the spiritual disciplines.

2. Infuse Intergenerational Experiences into Current Programs

Think of all the possibilities for incorporating intergenerational relationship building and experiences using the programs and activities your church is already offering—age-specific programs and all ages community activities. Allow the following ideas to spark your own thinking about the potential for infusing an intergenerational element into current programs and activities.

- Include all generations in Sunday worship and involve all generations in worship leadership roles—music, art, hospitality, reading Scripture, and more. While there may be time during the Scripture readings and sermon/homily when children have a separate experience, it’s important to have children involved with the whole worship community for most of the service.
- Add other generations into current age-group programs, such as mission trips, service projects, retreat experiences, and vacation Bible school. Consider adding intergenerational experiences into VBS such as a grandparent component or redesigning the youth mission trip into an all ages mission trip from adolescents to older adults.
- Incorporate intergenerational dialogues, interviews, and presentations into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of (older) adults; and then reverse the process and provide opportunities for the (older) adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Add a mentoring component into children, adolescent, and parent programming: parent mentors for baptism parents, confirmation mentors, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, justice and service mentors—to name a few possibilities.
- Connect people of different generations who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to other generations, for example midlife and mature adults helping new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.

- Involve the whole community in praying for special moments and experiences, for example: birth and baptism of a child, young people on a mission trip or retreat weekend, a milestone event such as first communion or graduations.
- Add intergenerational relationship building and activities into social and recreational activities in the church, such as the church picnic and after worship gatherings.
- Develop specific roles for the younger generations in church leadership, such as adolescents serving as teachers in children’s faith formation or as worship leaders.
- Develop a leadership or ministry apprenticeship for younger generations to serve in church ministries and leadership positions.

3. Connect the Generations through Intergenerational Programs

A third way to enhance the power of intergenerational faith formation experiences in your church is to create new programs and activities that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. Here are ideas for creating new intergenerational learning and intergenerational service programming.

Milestones throughout Life

Milestones are significant moments in life’s journey that provide the opportunity for people of all ages to experience God’s love, and grow in faith through sacred and ordinary events both in the life of the church and in daily life. Faith formation around milestones, sacramental celebrations, and life transitions provides another way that churches can be intentionally intergenerational—engaging the whole community in the celebration of the milestone, promoting the spiritual and faith growth of all ages, enhancing family faith practice at home, and strengthening people’s engagement in the church community.

Churches milestones include: baptism, welcoming young children to worship, first communion, presentation of Bibles, confirmation, marriage, a funeral, sending people on mission trips, and much more. *Lifecycle milestones* include: entering a new stage of schooling, graduations (middle school, high school, college, or graduate school), getting a driver’s license, leaving home for college or the military, first home or apartment, new career or job, moving, retirement, death of a family member, and much more. *Annual milestones* include birthdays, anniversaries, start of the school year (e.g. blessing backpacks), seasons of the church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week), and much more.

Each milestone incorporates intergenerational components at home and church: 1) a ritual celebration or a blessing marking the milestone with the whole church community; 2) a home ritual celebration or blessing marking the milestone; 3) a learning program, for the individual and the family, that prepares them for the milestone and its significance for their life and faith; 4) a tangible, visible reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, given by the church community; and 5) people and resources to support continuing faith growth and practice after the milestone.

Intergenerational/Family Service

Intergenerational service provides many benefits to individuals, families, and the whole church community. Intergenerational service helps narrow the generation gap between older and younger church members; recognizes that all people in the church, regardless of age, have talents to contribute that are valuable and important; assists children and youth in feeling a part of the church today, not just the church of tomorrow; connects the generations and builds relationships as they serve God by serving their neighbor; communicates that it is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of age, to serve people and work for justice as a follower Jesus Christ.

Churches can incorporate intergenerational service into existing service projects and activities *and* create intergenerational versions of an existing program. Almost any service project can become intergenerational. For example:

- Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
- Connecting youth with adults in the church who already preparing and serving meals at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Engaging children, parents, and older adults in collecting and delivering food baskets, school kits for children, “personal essentials” for those at a homeless shelter, toys at Christmas, gift packages for prisoners, and so on.
- Involve families in caring for the elderly by visiting them at a convalescent home or senior citizen facility or doing chores and shopping.
- Supporting efforts to provide vaccines and medical care to the world’s poor, such as mosquito nets for malaria prevention and immunizations against childhood disease.
- Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to a) support the efforts of local and national groups who work directly with the poor, b) adopt a community in another country by supporting them financially and learning about their culture and community life, or c) support organizations that are building schools and libraries for children in the poorest countries of the world by providing books and/or our money to purchase books for children.
- Develop intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God’s creation, and build peace by 1) becoming familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people’s basic needs, 2) writing advocacy letters or emails, 3) working with advocacy groups, and/or 4) working with organizations that are changing the structures that promote injustice.
- Holding a fair trade festival to provide a way for people to buy fair trade products, such as coffee, chocolate, and crafts, that benefit local producers in the developing world.
- Sponsoring a community-wide “care for the environment day” by planting trees and cleaning-up the community

Here are several ideas for creating new programming that engages all ages in serving those in need, caring for creation, and working for justice. There are so many local, national, and global organizations that provide educational resources and action projects your church can use to create new intergenerational programming.

- **An Annual Church-Wide Service Day.** Mobilize the whole faith community through an annual church-wide justice and service project. Create a four-week, church-wide campaign that culminates on a Sunday where the entire church engages in service projects in and with the community. As an individual church or with churches in your area, select a local and global project already developed by a justice or service organization. Then develop an annual theme, such as poverty, care for creation, peacemaking. Prepare the whole community for the service engagement, utilizing the resources developed by the partner organizations. Include 1) worship and prayer experiences focused on the particular theme or project; 2) educational sessions including social analysis of the issues and reflection on the teachings of scripture and the Christian tradition; 3) household activities on the theme or project such as prayers, learning resources, and action suggestions; 4) a website with the resources, activities, action projects, and features to allow people to share what they are doing; and 5) special presentations by experts on the issues and by people engaged in action on the issue.
- **A Monthly Intergenerational Service Project.** Using the same design as the church-wide service day, a church can develop a monthly service project that addresses one particular need or issue (local and/or global) each month. Each month's project can include a short educational program of the topic, an action project, and reflection on the project. Themes for the service projects can correspond with calendar events and seasons, as well as church year seasons. Examples include Back to School (September) and school kits for students, Thanksgiving (November) and feeding the hungry, Lent (February or March) and serving the poor, and Earth Day (April) and caring for creation.
- **Intergenerational Service Nights at Church.** Service Nights are simple, self-contained programs at church that feature five to ten service activity stations that engage all ages in doing a simple project for the benefit of a group in need. At one station people might create greeting cards for the elderly or for sick church members. At another booth they might make blankets for a homeless shelter. At another booth they might bake cookies or make sandwiches for a soup kitchen. Many organizations provide the organizational logistics a church needs to a service project, for example Feed My Starving Children provides the resources for people to pack food that will be shipped to people in need.

Intergenerational/Family Learning

The Generations of Faith intergenerational model is based on the work of James White in his book *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988). White identified four patterns of relationships that shape the four components of an intergenerational religious education learning experience: 1) in-common experiences, 2) parallel learning, 3) contributive occasions, and 4) interactive sharing.

The model created by the Generations of Faith Project used White's four components in the following way. This model can be used for all ages intergenerational faith formation or for family faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents (and grandparents).

1. Gathering and opening prayer
2. All-ages learning experience: intergenerational learning begins with a multigenerational experience of a theme that all generations can share together.
3. In-depth learning experience: through structured learning activities each generation—families with children, adolescents, and other adults—explores the biblical and theological understanding of the topic, using one of three possible formats:
 - The *Age Group Format* provides parallel, age-appropriate learning for groups at the same time. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic—utilizing specific learning activities that are designed for their life cycle stage: families with children or children alone, adolescents, young adults, and adults.
 - The *Whole Group Format* provides a series of facilitated learning activities for everyone at the same time using intergenerational or age-specific small groups or table groups.
 - The *Learning Activity Center Format* provides structured intergenerational and age-specific learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area.
4. Sharing learning reflections and application: in intergenerational groups participants share what they learned and prepare for applying their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or online.
5. Closing prayer service

Churches are using the intergenerational model of learning in a variety of ways:

1. To develop a faith formation curriculum for the whole community using intergenerational faith formation as the primary learning model, supplemented by age-specific and affinity group faith formation models
2. To extend a topic featured in the faith formation program for children or teens, to the whole community through intergenerational learning
3. To replace a topic in the children or adolescent program with intergenerational learning on the same theme
4. To add intergenerational learning to milestone and sacramental preparation and celebrations
5. To conduct intergenerational faith formation around church year feasts and seasons, such as Advent-Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Pentecost, and more
6. To add intergenerational learning experiences into a vacation Bible school, camp, or summer program
7. To conduct intergenerational learning in preparation for service projects and actions for justice
8. To sponsor an intergenerational retreat for the whole community.

Churches that make intergenerational learning their core faith formation experience for all ages conduct monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly intergenerational programs, and then offer a variety of age-group or affinity-group programs throughout the month or year to address specific age-appropriate needs. These churches replace or modify their age group programming to place the emphasis on all ages learning together. They develop a multi-year curriculum for the whole community built around themes from the Bible, the cycle of Sunday lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, Christian practices, service and social justice, prayer and spiritual disciplines, core Christian beliefs, and moral teachings.

Intergenerational/Family Vacation Bible School

Churches have begun to re-think vacation Bible school, redesigning a child-only experience into a family or intergenerational experience. One approach to intergenerational VBS has all ages participating for three or four evenings in the summer with food, fun, music, learning, and games. The program incorporates typical VBS Bible content and interactive learning, but everything is intergenerational. A typical evening design (3 hours) could look like this: registration, light meal, opening /music, Bible story, outdoor activity/inside craft, and snacks and closing. A second approach begins each evening with a family-style meal. Then the children participate in Bible stories and activities, while the adults (parents, grandparents) participate in an adult-themed session. Families then reunite in the church for music and prayer to close the evening.

5. Ideas for Family & Parent Programming

The family is the community where Christian faith practices are nurtured and practiced. We have discovered through research that certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and adolescents at home. Among the most important practices are:

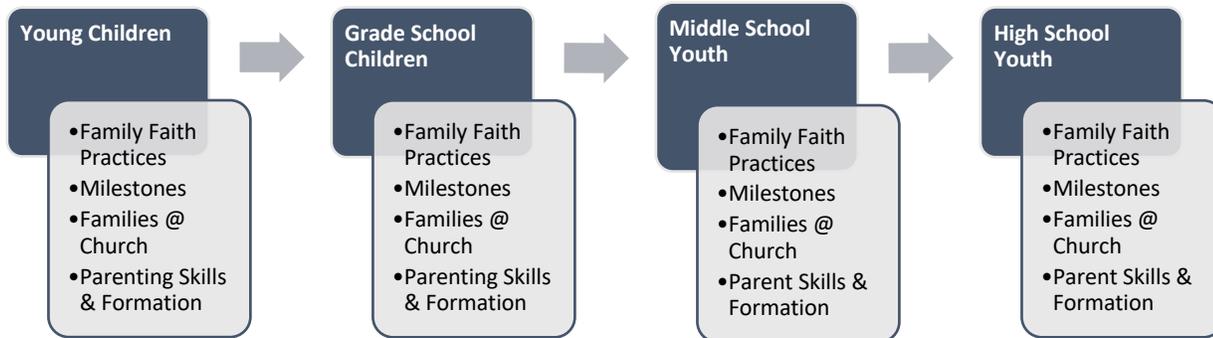
1. Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly.
2. Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally.
3. Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people.
4. Eating together as a family.
5. Having family conversations.
6. Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts.
7. Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences.
8. Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home.
9. Providing moral instruction.
10. Being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family.

Churches strengthen the family faith forming environment by focusing on family faith practice at home, family-involving church activities, and parent/grandparent formation.

1. Helping parents (or caregivers) and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship, and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.
2. Teaching parents and grandparents the practices for forming faith at home (celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, reading the Bible).
3. Equipping parents with the knowledge and skills for parenting today.
4. Providing experiences at church for the whole family that promote growth in faith and discipleship: learning, worship, service, and more.
5. Providing families with resources to nurture growth in Christian faith and practice at home.
6. Connecting with families at home with content and activities for family faith practices and parent formation.

Churches strengthen the family faith forming environment by developing a “faith practices curriculum for the family” around the specific life stage needs of families with young children, older (grade school) children, young adolescents, and older adolescents. Christian faith practices that make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of young people include: reading the Bible as a family;

praying together as a family; participating regularly in Sunday worship; being involved in the life of a faith community; serving people in need as a family and supporting young people in service; celebrating holidays, rituals, and church year seasons at home; having family conversations; talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts; ritualizing milestone experiences; and providing moral instruction.



An important element of family faith forming is preparing today’s parents and grandparents to teach and live the faith practices at home. Every church can create a parent plan with a progression of workshops, webinars, courses, activities, support groups, and resources from infancy through the end of the adolescent years that provides parent faith formation, equips parents to be faith formers of their children, and develops the knowledge and skills for effective parenting.

With new digital tools and media we have the ability to reach today’s parents and families anywhere and anytime with engaging and interactive faith forming content.

Here are several strategies for nurturing faith practices at home that involve both infusing practices into our current parish and school programming and creating new initiatives to equip and support faith practice at home.

1. **Incorporate faith practices throughout the year** by teaching the practices through experiential activities in children and youth programs, and then inviting parents to reinforce the practice through continued at-home experiences that you provide online for easy access. This strategy can reap huge rewards from childhood through the teen years. Image families focusing on one Bible stories each month or one prayer practice each month for ten years. What a difference this simple strategy can make. Here are two examples:

- **Reading the Bible:** Develop the “Bible Story of Month” plan to introduce children and teens to important stories and teachings in the Bible by teaching then the practices for reading, interpreting, praying, and applying the Scriptures to their lives. Select 12 of the most relevant and developmentally appropriate Bible stories for each age—from age 5 to 18. Integrate the Bible teaching into one session or program each month; use videos to assist you (Check out the animated videos at The Bible Project: <https://thebibleproject.com> and Jelly Telly: <https://www.jellytelly.com>). Then provide online resources for parents to reinforce the Bible story online: reading the story, watching the video, discussing the story. Be sure families of children have a good Bible: *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers*

His Name by Sally Lloyd-Jones (ZonderKidz) and *The Catholic Children's Bible* from St. Mary's Press are great resources. Here is another free resource to help: *Reading the Bible – Family Guide and Children's Workbook* from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* (Go to: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/faith-formation-in-christian-practices.html>).

- **Praying:** Develop the prayer life of children, teens, and families by focusing on learning Catholic prayers, teaching the different forms of prayer, and/or experiencing a prayer practice each month during the class or program. Have children and teens experience the different types of prayer: contemplative, Scriptural, intercessory, praise (adoration), and thanksgiving. Develop a short video of the children or teens praying so that parents can see prayer in action. Provide prayer activities and resources online for parents to continue the “prayer of the month” at home. There are excellent online prayer resource to make available to parents. Here is a free resource to help: *Praying – Family Guide and Children's Workbook* from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* (Go to: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/faith-formation-in-christian-practices.html>).

2. **Celebrate the seasons of the year** at home by identifying a monthly seasonal event, reflecting the calendar seasons and the church year seasons, and publish the activities on the family website. Incorporate Scripture, prayer, learning, service/action, ritual, and family conversation into each seasonal event. Highlight a Christian practice that will be communicated and experienced through the event. each event, for example:

- January: Martin Luther King Jr. (working for justice and peace, serving)
- February: Valentine's Day (loving)
- March: Lent (praying, serving/almsgiving, forgiving)
- April: Earth Day (caring for creation)
- May: Mother's Day (honoring parents, loving caring)
- June: Father's Day (honoring parents, loving, caring)
- July: Independence Day (working for justice)
- August: Back to school (celebrating new beginnings)
- September: Fall harvest (being grateful, generosity, caring for the earth)
- October: St. Francis (caring for creation, caring for animals, living simply)
- November: Thanksgiving (being grateful, serving, living hospitality)
- December: Advent and Christmas (celebrating rituals, praying, serving)

A parish or school can develop seasonal family festivals and gatherings to support the seasonal plan using the four seasons—fall, winter, spring, and summer—or the church year seasons—Advent-Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost.

3. **Connect families to Sunday worship** by incorporating preparation and/or reflection for Sunday in children and teen programs, and then deepening the Sunday worship experience at home through activities, practices, and resources from a variety of age-appropriate and whole-family digital content on the website. These activities can include: family conversation questions, weekly table ritual, podcast or video of the sermon with a study guide for the parents, children's creative

Bible activities, storybooks, videos presenting the Bible story, daily prayer, and weekly family devotion.

4. **Create family immersion experiences** on faith practices. Design extended time programs (half-day, full day) that teach faith practices through immersion experiences—at church or in the community—where families can experience a practice first hand, such as hospitality at a homeless shelter or serving a meal at a soup kitchen or caring for creation by planting a garden. Combine the at-church experience with activities for families to do at home. Substitute an age group program for a family program or add three or four family programs throughout the year that teach a practice by having the whole family experience it together.
5. **Develop family life skills** by adding a parent-child/teen component to age group faith formation or by adding special parent-child/teen programs throughout the year. Focus on the types of skill-building that will strengthen family life, and parent-child/teen relationships, such as: communicating effectively, discussing tough topics, making decisions and solving problems as a family, learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other, supporting each other (encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other), and treating each with respect and dignity. Many of these skills can be developed using movies selected for their positive messages. An example of a movie that provides a foundation for follow-up activities is Disney/Pixar’s *Inside Out* about the emotional life of child growing up.
6. **Create a digital platform**, using the parish/school website or by building a family faith formation website. To reach parents we need to use digital tools and methods, and a website focused on families is essential today. The website is the resource center and portal (i.e., links to other online resources) for the faith forming content (resources and activities in print, audio, and video) for families to engage in a practice at home. A parish or school can develop a family faith formation website that features each of the faith practices with engaging activities—print, audio, video, apps, and more—tailored to families with young children, older children, young adolescents, older adolescents, and the whole family, including “how to” information and videos for parents.
7. **Provide “how-to” assistance to parents** so they feel confident and competent to engage in faith practices at home with their children and teens. Provide parents with online practical information (print, audio, video) on the practices with actual activities to do at home. One simple way to do this is to create a short video of the children or teens experiencing the practice or activity, and then make it available on the website and/or on a special YouTube channel for your families.
8. **Communicate regularly with parents** using a family email newsletter or texting to highlight activities and videos online. Use social media to reinforce and spread the practice. For example, set up an Instagram account for faith formation and photos of the children and teens engaging in the practice in the program or class; and then invite them to post photos of their family engaging in the practice.

Ideas for Parent Programming

- 1. Parent website.** A parent or family faith formation website can provide online learning experiences (workshops, webinars, courses, audio podcasts, video programs). A website can provide parents with resources in all three content areas in a variety of media. The website can also extend learning from gathered parent programs. The website can include original programming created by the church and curated programming from other sources. Digital initiatives, such as the website or webinars, provide a way to reach a wider audience of parents in the community. A great example of a website designed for parents is ParentFurther: <http://www.parentfurther.com>.
- 2. Parent programs.** In gathered settings (large group or small group) or online (webinars, online courses, video programs) parent programs can be created and/or curated using the content suggested earlier.
 - Incorporate parent formation and education into church events that already engage parents, such as parent preparation programs for baptism, first communion, or confirmation, as well as the celebration of milestones
 - Add a parent-only component to family-intergenerational learning programs that addresses parent faith formation or skills development while their children are participating in child-focused activities. Gather the groups together for a shared experience to put into practice what they learned.
 - Add a parallel parent program to the existing children and adolescent program where parents can gather occasionally while their children are in age-specific programs.
 - Add a parent component to vacation Bible school in the evenings or online.
- 3. Laboratory experiences.** Immerse parents in hands-on experiences—with or without their children—that teach knowledge and skills for faith-forming and parenting. A family-centered worship experience can be an opportunity to teach parents about worship, reading the Bible, and how to do these things at home. A church-wide service day can be an opportunity to teach parents about the biblical basis of service and how to integrate service into family life. A church year seasonal celebration can be an opportunity to teach about ritual and how to celebrate rituals and church year seasons at home. These immersion experiences can be supported with online content for parents and for the whole family.
- 4. Parent mentors.** Provide guidance and support for parents and the whole family at each stage of life with mentors drawn from the grandparent generation who are actively engaged in church and bring decades of parenting and family life experiences. Churches can identify and provide training for mentors (mentoring skills, understanding today's family, learning how to access online resources and activities, and more). Developing relationships between parents and mentors can begin with birth/baptism. Mentoring can be life-cycle specific with mentors who focus on children or adolescents. Churches can also identify mentors (spiritual guides) who attend to people's spiritual life, guiding them in growing in their relationship with God and learning more about the Christian faith.
- 5. Life cycle or affinity groups for parents.** Create gathered settings (church, home, community) and in online groups (such as a Facebook parents group) that provide opportunities for parents

with children in the same age group to talk about parenting, get information and encouragement, discuss family life issues and challenges, and more. Churches can also sponsor support groups for divorced parents, parents in blended families, parents of children with special needs, and other affinity groupings. An example of a life cycle support group is MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers).

6. **Have parents practice new skills with their own children during program sessions.** This is in contrast to training programs where no practice takes place or where parents are asked to role-play with another parent or the group leader.
7. **Design programs that engage parents in the learning experience.** Parent programs need to have content that is relevant to parents and processes that help parents learn and want to participate in new learning. Here are several tips for designing and leading effective educational experiences for parents.
 - Create a supportive, caring environment for learning. Greet parents, provide time for them to get acquainted with one another, and encourage mutual support during and after the experience.
 - Actively engage parents in the learning. The amount they learn will be in direct proportion to how much they put into the experience.
 - Let parents be the experts. Show that you value their knowledge and experience by giving them opportunities to contribute to the learning experience.
 - Tie the learning activities around the parents' experiences and values so they know "this is for me and about my family."
 - Focus the content on real needs, issues, and concerns, not just on content that parents ought to know. If, for example, you want to help parents teach their child/teen about healthy concepts of right and wrong, first identify the ways this connects with parents' needs or concerns regarding moral values, then develop the experience to reflect those concerns.
 - Include information and skills parents can put into action immediately. Such application reinforces and helps parents internalize what they learn.
 - Demonstrate how to use skills and practices during the program so that parents have a direct experience of how to use the skills or practice at home.
 - Provide resources that parents can use for their own personal growth and with their family. Consider developing a parent website with resources and links to websites to enhance and expand the learning experience.
8. **Use a variety of environments and methods to engage all parents, anytime and anywhere.** Use a variety of settings—independent, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world—to offer a diversity of programs as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments. This provides parents with more options to participate and broadens the scope of parent formation and education offerings.
9. **Use online platforms and digitally enabled strategies.** Utilize the abundance of digital media and tools for parent formation and education—to engage parents anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time—and extend and expand faith formation from physical, face-to-face settings into their daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms for parents (websites)

integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere, 24-7-365. Digital media tools and resources—social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more), webinars and online learning, video conferencing, videos, audio podcasts, and much more—provide more features in designing parent programs, more methods for delivering programs, and more ways to connecting parents to each other.

10. **Give parents a plan.** Reggie Joiner and the Think Orange team emphasize how important it is to give families a plan. “When parents show up at church, they are often asking silent questions that we must answer; questions they don’t even know they’re asking. To begin looking at parents through a different filter, imagine that every time a parent walks through the door, he or she is asking you to do three things:
- *Give me the plan.* Most parents are parenting reactively, yet many of them desire to be proactive. They want a plan that will give them a system of support, consistent influence, and a steady flow of relevant information. In essence, what they need from the church is a partner.
 - *Show me how it works.* Parents need to be influences as much as children do, and they desire to be engaged in the process in a way that prompts them to take the best next step. Church leadership has the potential to challenge them collectively and give them a network of families to connect with personally.
 - *Tell me what to do today.* If we are going to truly partner with parents, we have to give them specific instructions or resources to use this week. Sometimes parents have a lack of vision, but often they just don’t know where to start. Give parents a map and a schedule.