



# Faith for a Lifetime

Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learning and Faith Formation

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## Lifelong Faith Formation in Your Church: Three Reflection Activities

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*This is the first article in the Lifelong Faith course.*

I believe that there is no more important ministry of the local church than faith formation and its mission of forming people of all ages and generations in Christian faith and discipleship for a lifetime. I believe that vibrant and vital lifelong faith formation is transformational for individuals, families, and the whole church. Learning changes lives and communities. The questions of why, what, how, where, and with whom people learn and grow in faith today are central for all of us in the church.

Simply put, lifelong faith formation is *accompanying people throughout life as they mature in faith and discipleship, learn more deeply about the Christian faith and how it informs and forms their lives today, and practice their Christian faith in all the arenas of their lives.*

I believe every church wants to embrace the power and potential of lifelong learning and faith formation. Every church can become a center of lifelong learning in faith and discipleship. Lifelong faith formation can be a reality for every church community, regardless of size, finances, location, and resources. The significant challenges and obstacles churches face are daunting, but I believe they are opportunities for designing faith formation to be more responsive, resilient, flexible, and adaptable.

***But now do you make this vision a reality!***

In *Lifelong Faith: Formation for All Ages and Generations* I propose seven elements that I believe are essential for developing lifelong faith formation in the next decade and beyond—to transform faith formation in your church. These are elements that every church can contextualize and customize to their size, location, and diversity of their people. Using these elements to build lifelong faith formation requires committed leadership and a willingness to tap into the gifts and talents and energy of the whole faith community.

We will explore the seven elements and how to apply them to your church in subsequent articles. Briefly, here are the seven elements:

1. **Goals** for maturing in faith for a lifetime. Everything begins with a church’s vision of discipleship and goals for maturing in faith that address the “why” or purpose of lifelong faith formation. I propose ten goals for maturing in faith that provide a framework for building the network, designing programming, and selecting resources.
2. **Practices** for forming a Christian way of life: Practices for following Jesus and living the Christian life form the central content or curriculum for lifelong faith formation today.
3. **Intergenerational** faith formation through Christian community: Faith is formed and grows through a culture of intergenerationality that engages all ages together in shared, faith-forming experiences of caring relationships, worship, service, learning, praying, and more.
4. **Family** faith formation with three generations: The family is the primary way Christian identity becomes rooted in the lives of young people, through faith practices at home, faith-forming activities at church, and the faith and modeling of parents, caregivers, and grandparents.
5. **Life Stage** faith formation with all ages: Faith formation is designed to address the diversity of people’s life situations, needs, interests, and faith journeys through:
  - content targeted to people’s life tasks, situations, needs, and spiritual journeys
  - a variety of methods and ways to learn
  - a variety of formats for learning (on your own, mentored, small group, at home, large group)
  - a variety of programming (gathered in physical places, online, and hybrid blending the two) in real time (synchronous) and on your own time (asynchronous)
6. **Pathways** for personalizing faith formation: Pathways address diverse faith growth needs by guiding people in discerning their needs and developing a personalized faith growth plan that utilizes a variety of formation experiences.
7. **Playlists** for engaging people of all ages in faith formation: Faith formation playlists provide a variety of curated faith-forming experiences (in-person and online) that families, individuals, and small groups can use to address areas identified in their faith growth plans.

## Beginning with Reflection and Analysis

The three activities in this article provide you with an opportunity to reflect and analyze lifelong faith formation in your church. You can do these three activities alone. However, I would recommend that you gather a team of people (e.g., church staff, faith formation leaders) to complete the three activities and to analyze what they tell you about the current state of lifelong faith formation in your church.

# Activity 1: Characteristics of Lifelong Faith Formation

Activity 1 uses the seven elements of lifelong faith formation to create a series of characteristics of lifelong faith formation. Use this tool to explore the importance of each characteristic in the life of your church and how well each characteristic is present in your church today. Rate each of the following characteristics of lifelong faith formation in two ways:

- *Left Column:* How important is this characteristic for your church? Rate each characteristic from 1-5 (low importance to high importance).
- *Right Column:* How well does this characteristic describe faith formation in your church? Rate each characteristic from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree, based on how true it is for your church.

| <b>How Important?</b><br><i>Low to High</i> | <b>Characteristics of Lifelong Faith Formation</b>  | <b>How True for Us?</b><br><i>Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree</i> |
|---|---|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 1. Our church has a shared vision for lifelong faith maturing with goals that describe what we are seeking to accomplish in people's lives, and that informs what we do at each stage of life.  | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 2. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for young children (0-5) and for grade school children.   | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 3. Our church offers children a variety of methods and ways to learn and a variety of formats for learning (small group, at home, large group).   | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 4. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for middle school and high school adolescents.  | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 5. Our church offers adolescents a variety of methods and ways to learn; a variety of formats for learning (on your own, mentored, small group, at home, large group); a variety of programming (physical places, online, and hybrid) in scheduled (synchronous) and unscheduled time (asynchronous). | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 6. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for young adults (20s-30s).   | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 7. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for midlife adults (40s-50s).   | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 8. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for mature adults (60s-70s).  | 1 2 3 4 5   |
| 1 2 3 4 5                                   | 9. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for older adults (80s+).  | 1 2 3 4 5   |

|           |   |           |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 10. Our church offers adults a variety of methods and ways to learn; a variety of formats for learning (on your own, mentored, small group, at home, large group); a variety of programming (physical places, online, and hybrid) in scheduled (synchronous) and unscheduled time (asynchronous). | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 11. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for families of children – at home and at church.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 12. Our church has planned and organized faith formation for families of teens – at home and at church.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 13. Our church equips and supports parents to become faith formers of their children and teens.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 14. Our church provides experiences for the whole family that promote growth in faith and discipleship (learning, service, prayer, worship, etc.)   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 15. Our church helps parents and caregivers grow in faith and discipleship, and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 16. Our church equips parents and caregivers to incorporate faith practices into family life at home.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 17. Our church provides resources for family faith formation at home  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 18. Our church engages all ages together in shared faith-forming experiences of caring relationships, worship, service, learning, praying, and more.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 19. Our church brings all generations together in Sunday/ weekend worship, including children and youth.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 20. Our church regularly brings all generations together for learning programs and activities that teach the Bible and the Christian tradition.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 21. Our church regularly brings all generations together in actions that serve the poor and vulnerable, and that promote justice, locally and globally.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 22. Our church has a website (and other digital platforms) that provides faith forming content and activities for all ages.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 23. Our church helps people of all ages come to know Jesus Christ personally and learn how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |

|           |   |           |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 24. Our church teaches people of all ages how to read and discover the meaning of the Bible for their lives.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 25. Our church teaches people of all ages about Christian perspectives on moral questions and how to apply their faith to decisions about what's right and wrong. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 26. Our church equips people of all ages to live their Christian faith in daily life.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 27. Our church equips people of all ages to share their faith with others.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 28. Our church teaches the Christian story and beliefs and guides people of all ages in integrating its meaning into their lives.                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 29. Our church teaches people of all ages how to pray and nurtures their spiritual growth through practices and disciplines.                                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 30. Our church equips people of all ages to serve those in need, care for God's creation, and act and advocate for justice and peace.                             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 31. Our church prepares people of all ages for worshipping God with the community on Sunday and throughout the seasons of the church year                         | 1 2 3 4 5 |

## Discussion

If you are doing this activity with a group, develop a composite score of the group's assessment of the "How Important" ratings and the "How True" ratings.

Discuss the reasons for people's ratings using the following questions:

### Importance

- Is this an accurate picture of what our church holds as important in faith formation?
- Why do we believe it is accurate or inaccurate?
- Should a particular characteristic have a higher or lower importance than it currently has?
- What does this profile tell us about what our church values as important in faith formation?
- What needs to be more important moving forward?

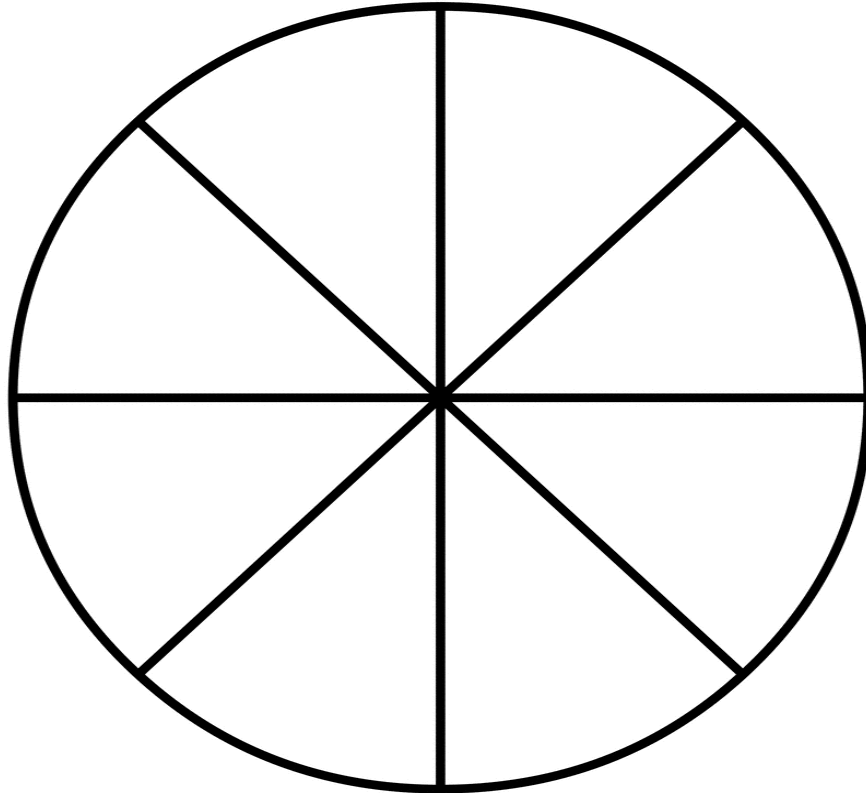
### True

- Is this an accurate picture of how our church is actually living each characteristic?
- Why do we believe it is accurate or inaccurate?
- Should a particular rating be higher or lower than it currently is?
- What does this profile tell us about how our church is living lifelong faith formation?
- Which characteristics do we need to improve or strengthen moving forward?

## Activity 2. Investment in Faith Formation

Imagine a pie representing 100% of your church's investment in faith formation: people, time, energy, resources, money, and programming. What would the percentages look like for the following eight categories? Label each pie slice and write the percentage in the slice.

1. Children (0-5) and Children (6-10) *Split the pie slice into half for each age group.*
2. Adolescents (11-19) *Split the pie slice into half for middle and high school.*
3. Young Adults (20s-30s)
4. Midlife Adults (40s-50s)
5. Mature Adults (60s-70s)
6. Older Adults (80+)
7. The Whole Family Together (church and home)
8. All Ages Learning Together (intergenerational)



### Discussion

1. What does the pie chart tell you about the allocation of people, time, energy, money, resources, and programming in lifelong faith formation?
2. What does the percentage allocation tell you about the assumptions your church is making about forming faith and how people mature in Christian faith?
3. What do the results suggest about the future development of lifelong faith formation?

## Activity 3. Lifelong Faith Formation Profile

Develop a profile of your church's current faith formation programs, activities, experiences, and events – at church, at home, online, and in other settings (in your community, at a retreat center, on mission trips, etc.) – for each stage of life. Incorporate intergenerational experiences and events, family programs and activities, and age group programming. Use this format to create your own profile on a large sheet of paper or a spreadsheet.

|                                   | <b>Life Stage Faith Formation</b> | <b>Parent &amp; Family Faith Formation</b> | <b>Intergenerational Faith Formation</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Young Children (0-5)              |                                   |  |  |
| Grade School Children (6-10)      |                                   |  |  |
| Young Adolescents (middle school) |                                   |  |  |
| Older Adolescents (high school)   |                                   |  |  |
| Young Adults (20s-30s)            |                                   |  |  |
| Midlife Adults (40s-50s)          |                                   |  |  |
| Mature Adults (60s-70s)           |                                   |  |  |
| Older Adults (80+)                |                                   |  |  |

### Analyze Your Profile

1. What are the strengths in our current faith formation across the life stages?
2. Where are the gaps (or opportunities)?
3. What do we need to continue doing?
4. What do we need to stop doing?
5. What needs to be strengthened or improved?
6. What needs to be expanded or needs to be extended to reach and engage more people?
7. What do we need to start doing? What new initiatives need to be created to address gaps, respond to new needs and challenges, engage new audiences?