



Faith for a Lifetime

Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learning and Faith Formation

Goals for Maturing in Faith for a Lifetime

John Roberto

What's your vision for maturing in faith? What does a vital Christian faith look like at each stage of the life span? What are the characteristics of a committed, maturing Christian who is growing in faith and discipleship? How does your vision guide the development of faith formation at each stage of life? These are questions that are rarely asked, but our response to each one is central to the vitality and effectiveness of faith formation across the life span.

I am proposing ten goals for maturing in faith that can guide the development of faith formation at each stage of life so that we can (re)direct our attention to people growing in faith and discipleship. Guided by the ten goals we can ask what we need to be doing to help faith and discipleship flourish in the lives of our people from childhood through older adulthood.

This is a huge shift in emphasis from our current church-centric focus on providing curriculum, courses, classes, programs, and activities—often with little reference to how we see faith flourishing at each stage of life. This change of focus reflects a significant shift from a provider-centered, program- and content-driven approach to a *person-centered* approach to faith formation. Becoming goal-centered opens up multiple ways (activities, methods, programs) to promote faith and discipleship through developmentally-appropriate faith forming experiences at each stage of life.

Drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research studies on what makes a difference in forming faith in people's lives across the life span, I am proposing the following ten goals (or characteristics) of faith maturing. They incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. When taken together, these characteristics describe a person maturing in faith. They form the basis of helping people discern their faith journey and needs, and accompanying them through relationships, programs, activities, and resources.

Goals for 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 the foundational teachings of one's particular Christian faith tradition and integrating its meaning into one's life



5. Praying—together and alone—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. Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one’s gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world

Guided by the ten goals, churches can ask what they can do to help faith and discipleship flourish in the lives of people from childhood through older adulthood. The ten goals can be thought of as a framework for designing developmentally appropriate experiences, programs, activities, and resources for each stage of life: children, adolescents, young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (60s–70s), and older adults (80+). The goals provide a seamless process of fostering faith growth from birth through older adulthood because everyone shares a common vision of maturing in faith. Churches (and individuals) can visualize how faith can mature from childhood through older adults. Everything is in service to people growing in faith and discipleship.

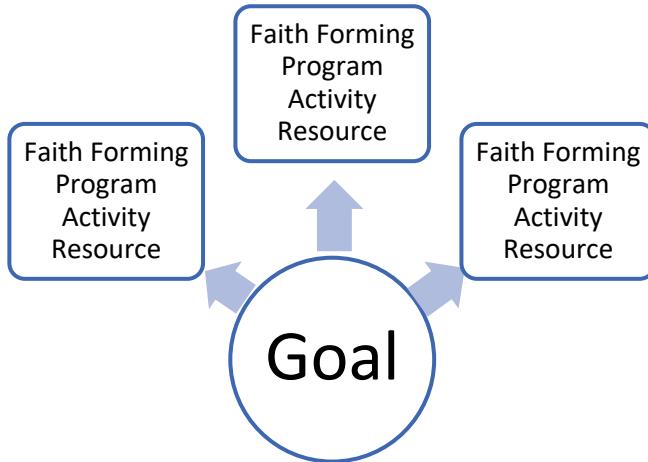
At each stage of life, people experience faith-forming experiences with the whole community (intergenerational), with the whole family, and with their life stage (peer) groups. Faith formation at each stage of life blends intergenerational, family, and age group settings into a holistic approach, centered 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.

In this approach, congregations build faith forming experiences around the ten goals and ask how can they can guide people in. . . .

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

Becoming goal-centered means that there are multiple approaches, programs, activities, and media to help people grow in faith—one goal, multiple ways to grow. No longer will faith formation be limited by the one-program, one-textbook/resource, one fixed-time and place approach. The focus will be on the person growing in faith and discipleship guided by the ten goals and a multiplicity of ways to form faith.





Faith formation designed around these goals for maturing in faith needs to be responsive to the diversity of people's religious practice and engagements. We can identify four distinct spiritual-religious identities in people of all ages: the Engaged who demonstrate a vibrant faith and relationship with God and are actively engaged in the faith community, the Occasionals who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith and practice is less central to their lives, the Spirituals who are living spiritual lives but not involved in a church community, and the Unaffiliated who are not affiliated with a church or religious tradition and have little need for God or religion.

Bringing a Lifelong Vision of Faith Maturing to Life

To bring the vision of maturing in faith to life, develop a six-season (ten decades) plan for lifelong faith formation. Each season can have a particular focus or theme reflecting the most essential content and experiences, designed around the unique developmental characteristics, life tasks and issues, and religious and spiritual needs of people in each season of life. No decade would be viewed in isolation—each would be seen as part of a ten-decade view of faith growth and maturing in faith. Use the following process to explore how faith formation in your church today works toward achieving your goals for maturing in faith with all the seasons of life.

Step 1: Formulate Goals for Maturing in Faith

What is your vision of maturing in faith? Toward what ends (goals) are your church's faith formation efforts directed? What are your church's goals for maturing in faith and discipleship?
Use the ten goals as a starting point for developing your church's goals.

Step 2: Develop a Profile Using the Goals for Maturing in Faith

What is your church trying to accomplish in the lives of people at each stage of life from childhood to older adulthood? Using the ten goals (or the goals you have developed for your church), identify how your church implements the goals through experiences, programs, activities, and resources in each season of life.

- ◆ Childhood (0–10)
- ◆ Adolescence (11–19)
- ◆ Young Adults (20s–30s)
- ◆ Midlife Adults (40s–50s)
- ◆ Mature Adults (60s–70s)
- ◆ Older Adults (80+)

Step 3: Analyze Faith Formation through the Lens of the Goals

Analyze the ways that your church nurtures faith growth through the six seasons and stages of the life cycle by reflecting on these three questions:

- ◆ Which goals are being addressed most effectively through programs, activities, and experiences?
- ◆ Which goals need to be addressed more effectively by strengthening or improving programs, activities, and experiences?
- ◆ Which goals need new initiatives so they can be addressed effectively?

Step 4: Explore New Ways to Strengthen and Expand Faith Formation for Each Season of Life

There are several ways to strengthen and/or expand faith formation based on your analysis. Here are two approaches to get you thinking:

1. You might find one or two goals that need attention with all ages. Make these goals a “whole church” focus for a year of faith formation—planning intergenerational, family, and life stage programs, activities, and experiences.
2. You might find one or more life stages that need attention. Develop a multiyear plan for developing faith formation with each life stage. Begin with a few new initiatives that you want to test in the first year (guided by the goals). Evaluate their effectiveness and expand them in years two and three. Continue to develop new programs, activities, and experiences for year two and year three. Evaluate and expand.

Conclusion

The ten goals provide a vision and a framework for designing developmentally appropriate experiences, programs, activities, and resources for each stage of life: children, adolescents, young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (60s–70s), and older adults (80+). They provide a seamless process of fostering faith growth from birth through older adulthood because everyone shares a common vision of maturing in faith. They are a great way to begin the move toward a lifelong learning paradigm in your church.

The ten goals are a starting point. They need to be contextualized within each specific Christian tradition, the identity and mission of a local church community, and the unique social, cultural, and ethnic make-up of the community. Every church needs a shared vision and goals for maturing in the Christian faith.



Your Church's Goals for Maturing in Faith

- ◆ What are your church's goals for maturing in faith and discipleship?

- ◆ Explore how the Ten Goals for Maturing in Faith are being practiced in your church.
Use this simple chart to organize your profile.

Goals	Children	Youth	Young Adults	Midlife Adults	Mature Adults	Older Adults
Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ						
Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life						
Reading and studying the Bible, and its message, meaning, and application to life today						
Learning the Christian story and the foundational teachings of one's particular Christian faith tradition and integrating its meaning into one's life						
Praying—together and alone—and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines						
Living with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and values						
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						
Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship and ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year						
Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the faith community						
Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one's gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world						

