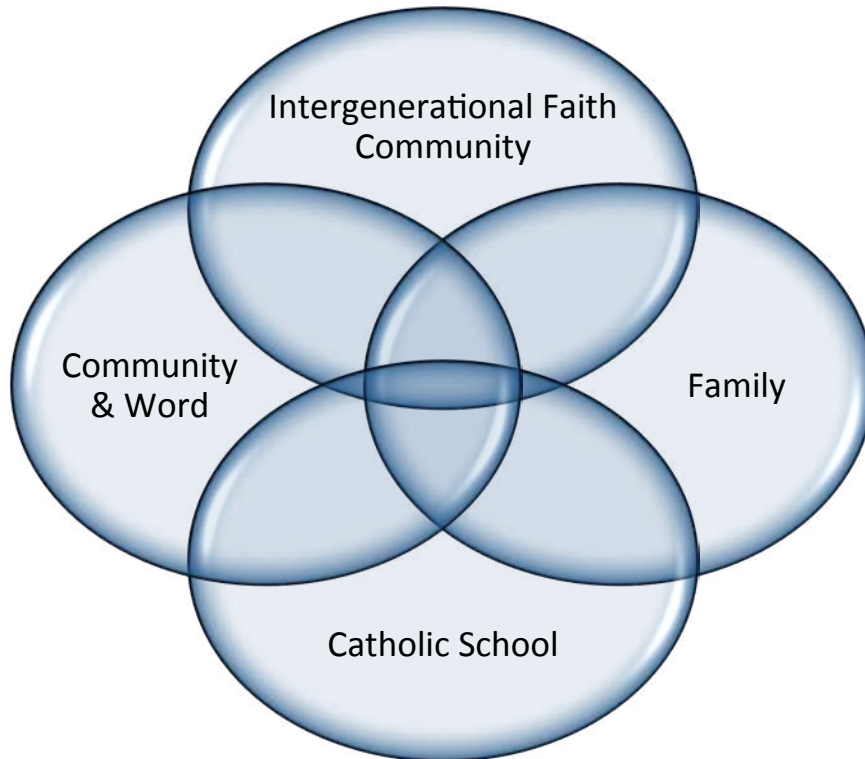# Faith Formation in a Changing World
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1. Faith Formation Today

An Ecological View: Immersive Environments for Faith Formation
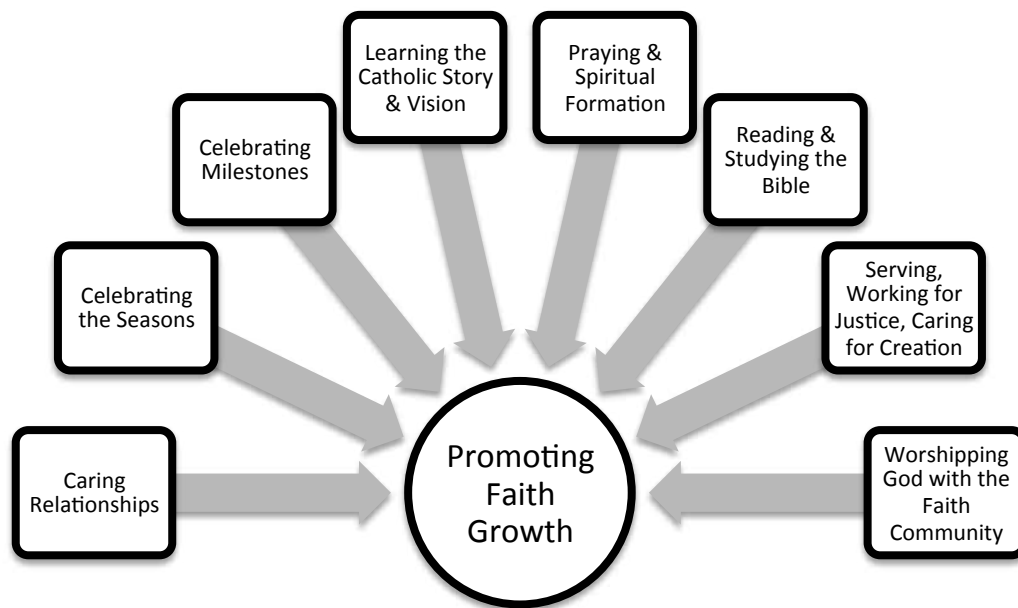

A Comprehensive View: Eight Faith Forming Processes

Faith formation is developed around the eight primary faith forming processes that facilitate faith growth and incorporate essential knowledge and practices of the Christian faith. These eight essential processes of forming faith – informed by Scripture, theology, research, and contemporary reflection – promote faith growth and discipleship with age groups, families, and the whole faith community.

1. **Caring Relationships.** Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love.
2. **Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons.** Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year as they tell the story of faith through the year.
3. **Celebrating Rituals and Milestones.** Growing in faith and discipleship by celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones that provide a way to experience God's love through significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey.
4. **Learning and Living the Christian Story and Vision.** Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the Christian story and vision, reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world.

5. **Praying and Spiritual Formation.** Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.
6. **Reading and Studying the Bible.** Growing in faith and discipleship by encountering God in the Bible, and by studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today.
7. **Serving, Working for Justice., and Caring for Creation.** Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice.
8. **Worshipping God.** Growing in faith and discipleship by worshipping God with the community of faith—praising God; giving thanks for God's creative and redemptive work in the world; bringing our human joys and dilemmas to God; experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission.

Six Interrelated Tasks (General Directory for Catechesis)

1. Promoting knowledge of the faith
2. Liturgical education
3. Moral formation
4. Teaching to pray
5. Education for community life
6. Missionary initiation

All of these tasks are necessary. As the vitality of the human body depends on the proper function of all of its organs, so also the maturation of the Christian life requires that it be cultivated in all its dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development.

These tasks are interdependent and develop together. Each great catechetical theme—catechesis of God the Father, for example—has a cognitive dimension as well as moral implications. It is interiorized in prayer and appropriated in witness. One task echoes the other: knowledge of the faith prepares for mission; the sacramental life gives strength for moral transformation.

2. Environment: The School Community

Vision of Catholic Education
(Brothers of the Christian Schools – San Francisco New Orleans Province)

Faith in the Presence of God: We believe in the living presence of God in our students, our community, and our world.

Respect for All Persons: We honor and respect the dignity of all individuals.

Quality Education: We engage in quality education together as students, staff, and faculty by thinking critically and examining our world in light of faith.

Inclusive Community: We celebrate diversity and welcome all members of our community.

Service with the Poor: We are in solidarity with the poor and advocate for those suffering from injustices.

Faith Forming Environment (Excerpts from "Characteristics and Practices")

Catholic Identity: *A Lasallian Catholic school promotes Catholic identity by presenting and embodying the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith, tradition, and teachings in everything it does.*

- The school has a clear mission which embodies the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Lasallian Catholic tradition.
- The school helps all students develop an understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith and tradition through the academic curriculum and the daily life of the school.
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed compassionately and mercifully with respect for the cultural and religious diversity of the school community.
- The school provides a religious education program that incorporates the foundations of Catholicism—creed, sacraments, morality, and prayer—in an environment for the students to inquire, experience, develop, and practice their faith.
- Students are motivated through the religious studies curriculum, academic classes, and school activities to participate in the school's faith-related activities, such as service, retreats, prayer, and liturgical celebrations.
- The school creates an environment that encourages prayer and reflection where prayer is incorporated into the daily life of the school.
- The school provides a variety of liturgical and sacramental celebrations throughout the year, including the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- There is a retreat program across all grade levels for students with increasing depth and spiritual experience.

Educators: *Educators in Lasallian Catholic schools see their work as a vocation, animated by the Holy Spirit. They demonstrate a spirit of faith and zeal as they give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through their words and actions.*

- Faculty, staff, and administrators are faith-filled people who model their faith and vocation to one another and to the students.
- Faculty, staff, and administrators are involved in the religious and spiritual life of the school—campus ministry, retreats, liturgies, service, and vocation programs.
- There is a variety of formation opportunities to support faculty, staff, and administrators in their role of witnessing to the presence of God and sharing their faith.
- There are regular spiritual life and retreat experiences for faculty, staff, and administration that provide opportunities to developing their faith and spiritual life.
- The school provides faculty, staff, and administration with regular opportunities for faith sharing, socializing, and other forms of community-building.

Justice & Service: *A Lasallian Catholic school engages students and adults in cross-cultural and cross-economic experiences with the poor and marginalized in the wider community and world.*
- There is a comprehensive service-learning program across all grade levels for students which includes direct service to the poor and immersion programs.
- The school makes educating for justice and Catholic Social Teaching, and promoting social responsibility, integral to the school's curriculum.
- The school is seen as a place of dialogue where there are opportunities for meaningful interactions among and with the poor.
- The school sponsors and/or participates in service immersion experiences for students and adults.

Community: *A Lasallian Catholic school develops caring, trusting relationships among all members of the school community.*

Community: *A Lasallian Catholic school teaches respect and hospitality, promotes an atmosphere of understanding, and intentionally creates opportunities for students to interact and build relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.*

Community: *A Lasallian Catholic school creates a welcoming, safe, and caring environment for all members of the community.*

Respect for All Persons: *A Lasallian Catholic school recognizes the presence of God in every student and treats every student with respect and dignity.*

Respect for All Persons: *A Lasallian Catholic school fosters respect for the dignity of all people in the school regardless of economic background, culture and ethnicity, nationality, gender and sexual identity, and religious faith.*

3. Environment: The Family

- *What does a vibrant and vital family faith look like in a 21st century world?*
- *How do we meaningfully engage/connect with today's families?*
- *How do we empower/equip/resource families to transmit faith at home - to practice a vital and vibrant faith?*
- *How do we reach families who are not involved in a faith community or feel religion is not important?*

What Makes a Difference in Faith Growth
1. Parents' personal faith and practice
2. Parent-child relationship: close and warm

3. Parents' modeling and teaching a religious faith
4. Parents' involvement in church life
5. Grandparents' religious influence & relationship
6. Religious tradition a child is born into
7. Parents of the same faith
8. Family conversations about faith
9. Embedded family religious practices: praying, reading the Bible, serving, celebrating holidays, rituals

Families at the Center of Faith Formation

The *Family-at-the Center Approach* recognizes that parents and the family are the most powerful influence for virtually every child and youth outcome—personal, academic, social, and spiritual-religious; and that parents are *the* most important influence on the social and religious lives of children, youth, and emerging adults. Given the central role of families in shaping the lives of children and youth, the value of engaging, supporting, and educating families should be self-evident to all of us.

1. See the home as the essential and foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.
2. Reinforce the family's central role in promoting healthy development and faith growth in children and youth, and enhancing the faith-forming capacity of parents and grandparents.
3. Express care with the families in our congregations and communities, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them.
4. Provide support and advocacy when families really need it.
5. Share power with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals.
6. Build faith formation around the lives of the today's families and parents, rather than having the congregation prescribe the programs and activities that families will participate in.
7. Address the diversity of family life today by moving away from "one size fits all" programs and strategies toward a variety of programs and strategies tailored to the unique life tasks and situations, concerns and interest, and religious-spiritual journeys of parents and families.
8. Offer regular gatherings of all families for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.
9. Engage families together with the whole community for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.
10. Find ways to reach families at home with support, resources, and activities to develop family life and grow in faith.
11. Strengthen families by helping them develop the practices and skills for healthy family life.
12. Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for effective parenting and forming faith in young people.

Strategies

1. Discovering God in Everyday Life
2. Forming Faith at Home through the Life Cycle
3. Forming Faith through Milestones
4. Celebrating Seasonal Events through the Year
5. Encountering God in the Bible
6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally

7. Developing a Strong Family Life
8. Empowering Parents and Grandparents

4. Environment: Intergenerational Faith Community

Benefits
Bringing generations together provides benefits and blessings on a variety of levels. Insights from research and pastoral experience tell us that being intentionally intergenerational:
- affirms each person's value in the total community (regardless of age)
- fosters a foundation of support of each other's concerns, interests, and activities
- provides "up close and personal" formation in faith as children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults engage in sharing faith, teaching, learning, and praying for one another
- teaches us to care for one another
- provides role models for children and youth
- teaches us to value older adults
- allows us to pass on the traditions of family and faith
- enhances people's identification with their congregation and integration within the community
- encourages greater faith in all generations
- creates special relationships between adults and youth
- fosters leadership regardless of age or stature
- utilizes the strengths (the wisdom, experience, and knowledge) of one generation to meet the needs of another generation
- promotes understanding of shared values and respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life
- utilizes the creative talents of younger and older generations to provide service to the church and community

Connecting Intergenerationally
First, faith formation can focus programming around the intergenerational events of church life and *prepare* adults and all generations—with the appropriate knowledge and practices—for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith and *guide* their *participation* and *reflection* upon those events.
1. *The feasts and seasons of the church year* provide a natural rhythm and calendar to the curriculum: Advent and Christmas seasons, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lenten season, Holy Week, Easter, Easter season, Pentecost, All Saints and All Souls, and remembrances of saints and holy people throughout the year.
2. *Sunday worship and the Lectionary* provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its cycle of weekly Scripture readings.
3. *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life.
4. *Acts of service and justice*—locally and globally—provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teachings on service, justice, and care for the earth.
5. *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
6. *Congregational events* that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation.

Second, faith formation can connect age-specific programming with engagement in the inter-generational life and events of the faith community, for example:

1. Learn about worship and how to worship; experience Sunday worship with the faith community and practice worshipping; and live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives.
2. Learn about the Bible and how to read it, interpret it, and apply it to their lives; experience the Bible at Sunday worship and at home; and develop their own practice of Bible study and reading.
3. Learn about Jesus and the Christian tradition—teachings, history, practices, what it means for life today, and how to live the Christian faith today; and experience the life of Jesus and the Christian tradition through participation in the events of church life, especially church year feasts and seasons.
4. Learn about prayer and spirituality and how to develop their spiritual lives through prayer and spiritual discipleship; experience the prayer life of the faith community; and develop their own practice of prayer and the spiritual disciplines.
5. Learn about the justice issues of our day and the biblical and church teachings on justice, service, and care for creation; experience acts of justice and service with the faith community—locally and globally; and engage in the practices of serving those in need, caring for creation, and working for justice—as individuals, with their peers, with their families, and with their church and other groups and organizations.

Third, faith formation can enhance intergenerational relationships and ministry in the community by:

1. Incorporating intergenerational dialogues into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions. And then reversing the process and providing opportunities for the older adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
2. Developing mentoring relationships between adults and children/youth, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvements, and confirmation mentors.
3. Involving the community in praying for each generation, e.g., when people leave on a mission trip or retreat weekend or when people celebrate a milestone, such as the birth of a child, a marriage, a graduation, and a retirement.
4. Organizing social and recreational activities that build intergenerational relationships, such as an intergenerational Olympics, a Friday night simple meal during Lent, or a summer film festival (maybe outdoors on a large screen).
5. "Intergenerationalizing" age-group programming—take a child- or youth-only program and re-design it to include other generations, such as an intergenerational service program.
6. Integrating intergenerational programming into the age-group program plan and calendar, such as quarterly intergenerational nights as part of the children's faith formation program.
7. Structuring age-group programs with an intergenerational connection, such as an educational program that includes interviews, a panel, and/or storytelling with people of different ages.
8. Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
9. Sponsoring community-wide service projects that engage all ages.
10. Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to support the efforts of groups who work directly with the poor.
11. Developing intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God's creation, and build peace.

12. Offering simple, one-time opportunities for the older generations (adults) and the younger generations (children, youth, young adults) to get to know each other. These may include social events, service projects, or educational experiences. Make a concerted effort to invite people from all generations to plan and participate in the activities.

5. Digital Environment: Digitally Enabled and Digitally Connected Faith Formation

Faith formation is *digitally-enabled*—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation; and *digitally-connected*—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, peer experiences and programs , and daily/home life using online and digital media <u>and/or</u> reaching people at home and in daily life with online faith formation content and experiences that connect to church life and events.

Faith formation can now utilize digital technologies and digital media to engage people with faith-forming content anytime, anyplace, just-in-time—and extend and expand faith formation from physical, face-to-face settings into people's daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms for adult faith formation (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, 24x7x365.

Online		Digital Continuum		Face-to-Face
Fully Online	**Mostly Online**	**Online and Gathered**	**Gathered and Online Content**	**Gathered with Online Content**
An online program with all learning done online and limited face-to-face, gathered learning settings	A mostly online program with opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings	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.	A gathered event or program that provides online content and activities to extend and expand the learning from the gathered program	A gathered event or program that uses online content as part of the design of the event or program

Programming
1. A **variety** of relationships, content, experiences, and resources
2. New **methods**: immersive, multimedia, multi-sensory, highly visual, participatory, experiential
3. New **formats**: episodic engagements and experiences, micro-learning, on demand, mobile, 24x7
4. New **digital** media and digital platforms; connect with parents/families through social media; redesign programming with digital connections and extensions; address new needs through online experiences
5. **Multiple environments**: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.
6. **Multiple versions**: design a program once and offer it in multiple formats and environments, e.g., a gathered program that is recorded and can be used for individual study or small group study

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The Developmental Relationships Framework

Imagine what would happen if we could surround young people – in their families, schools, programs and neighborhoods – with the kinds of relationships through which they develop character strengths such as positive identity, agency, and commitment to community. That is the objective of the Developmental Relationships Project, a multiyear initiative through which Search Institute is conducting research and developing solutions that will help organizations that serve young people start and strengthen close connections in their lives. The Project began in 2013 with the creation of the Developmental Relationships Framework, which has since been the basis of several quantitative and qualitative studies and has been shared with thousands of practitioners and parents across the country. Based on that research and feedback, we have revised the Framework, which is summarized below.

Elements	Actions	Definitions
1. Express Care Show me that I matter to you.	• **Be dependable** • **Listen** • **Believe in me** • **Be warm** • **Encourage**	Be someone I can trust. Really pay attention when we are together. Make me feel known and valued. Show me you enjoy being with me. Praise me for my efforts and achievements.
2. Challenge Growth Push me to keep getting better.	• **Expect my best** • **Stretch** • **Hold me accountable** • **Reflect on failures**	Expect me to live up to my potential. Push me to go further. Insist I take responsibility for my actions. Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks.
3. Provide Support Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.	• **Navigate** • **Empower** • **Advocate** • **Set boundaries**	Guide me through hard situations and systems. Build my confidence to take charge of my life. Defend me when I need it. Put in place limits that keep me on track.
4. Share Power Treat me with respect and give me a say.	• **Respect me** • **Include me** • **Collaborate** • **Let me lead**	Take me seriously and treat me fairly. Involve me in decisions that affect me. Work with me to solve problems and reach goals. Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.
5. Expand Possibilities Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.	• **Inspire** • **Broaden horizons** • **Connect**	Inspire me to see possibilities for my future. Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. Introduce me to more people who can help me develop and thrive.

How Has the Framework Been Tested?

The original framework grew out of focus groups with youth, parents, educators, youth workers, and others as well as a review of the literature. Since then, we have:

- Introduced the framework to thousands of educators, youth workers, and parents;

- Conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with youth in different settings; and

- Examined student-teacher and parent-child relationships (including youth-parent pairs) through national* and pilot studies.

What Have We Learned So Far?

Several themes are emerging across the studies we have conducted to date:

- Developmental relationships are associated with multiple character strengths, including motivation to learn and personal responsibility, after controlling for demographic factors.

- Young people are least likely to experience sharing power and expanding possibilities.

- Sharing power is the area most strongly associated with multiple positive outcomes.

- Youth experiencing financial strain are less likely to experience developmental relationships.

- Youth with strong relationships are more resilient in the face of stress and trauma.

What Questions Remain to Be Examined?

Numerous critical questions drive Search Institute's research agenda moving forward.

- How are developmental relationships consistent and unique across *cultures and contexts?*

- How are *different relationships* (e.g., parent, teacher, peer, mentor) developmental in different ways? How do these different relationships complement each other?

- To what extent do developmental relationships *contribute to character strengths* in domains of identity, agency, and commitment to community, which in turn predict success in school, work, and other areas of life?

- What *intensity* and *longevity* is needed for developmental relationships to have an impact?

What's Next?

Research and Development: The heart of Search Institute's research and development agenda is to build a robust understanding of developmental relationships through *mixed-methods studies* with diverse populations of youth, examining relationships with parents, peers, mentors, teachers, and other caring adults.

In addition to mixed-methods observational studies (including longitudinal), we seek opportunities to conduct *experimental studies* to test the hypothesis that developmental relationships are key variables in effective interventions to address inequities and improve youth outcomes.

Improvement Solutions: Search Institute works with schools, youth organizations, and community coalitions to understand and strengthen relationships in young people's lives using the strategies and tools of improvement science. We are currently piloting two solution packages:

- *The REACH Process,* which focuses on strengthening relationships in schools as catalysts for students' academic motivation.

- *Keep Connected,* which focuses on strengthening parent-youth relationships as young people enter middle school.

* The first national study of developmental relationships is *Don't Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America's Efforts to Help All Children Succeed* (www.search-institute.org/dff).