

Brisbane Catholic Education Master Class

Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century

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Topics

1. A New Ecology of Christian Faith Formation
2. Focusing on Faith Maturing
3. Personalizing Faith Formation
4. Intergenerational Faith Formation
5. Family Faith Formation
6. Generation Z & 21st Century Learning
7. Digital Strategies for Faith Formation
8. Guide to Personalizing Learning

Handouts/Resources/PowerPoint Presentations:

- Lifelong Faith website: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/australia-2018.html>
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Resources

- *Digital Cathedral*. Keith Anderson. Church Publishing, 2015.
- *Faith Formation for a New Generation*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2018.
- *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2016.
- *Generations Together*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2014.
- *Intergenerational Christian Formation*. Holly Allen and Kristine Ross. Intervarsity Press, 2012
- *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.
- *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.

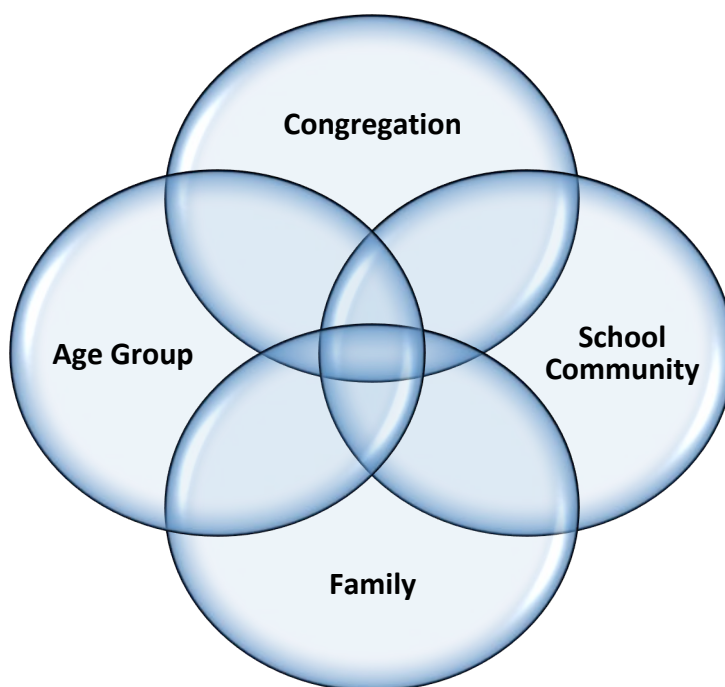
Online

- *Lifelong Faith Formation* website: www.lifelongfaith.com
- *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* website: www.FamiliesattheCenter.com
- *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* website: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com

Note:

The word “congregation” is used in many places of the handout to refer to the intergenerational faith community. Replace congregation with school community where appropriate.

1. A New Ecology of Christian Faith Formation



We know from research and practice that faith is formed in intergenerational faith communities, in families, in peer groups across the life cycle, and in missional settings where people are introduced to the Christian faith. We need to start thinking and acting ecologically in everything we do. For example, if we are creating a plan for children’s faith formation, we need to consider how we will engage children in faith community experiences with all generations (including worship), how we will equip parents to share faith at home and build families of faith practice, and how we will build relationships with and engage children and parents who are not involved in the faith community (e.g., baptized but not engaged). Once we have identified faith forming experiences in the broader ecology, we can identify the unique age-group experiences we need to provide children.

We can adopt a new approach to faith formation that is more community-centered, while at the same time being more person-centered. We can develop a plan for faith formation with children and adolescents that incorporates intergenerational faith forming experiences—engaging children and adolescents in faith community experiences with all generations (including worship), and family faith forming experiences—equipping parents to share faith at home and engaging in family faith practice. We are proposing that age group faith formation is situated within this ecology of faith formation. The blend of intergenerational, family, and age group settings makes for a comprehensive approach to faith formation.

Example: A School Culture Approach

(Lasallian Catholic Assessment Process: Lasallian District of San Francisco New Orleans_

Principle 1. Faith in the Presence of God: We believe in the living presence of God in our students, our community, and our world.

1. 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.
2. A Lasallian Catholic school has a clear and visible affiliation with its Lasallian heritage and demonstrates a consistent practice of Lasallian principles.

3. 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.
4. A Lasallian Catholic school fosters a culture of vocation by providing its students with opportunities to grow in holiness and discover how their gifts and talents can respond to the needs of the Church and world.
5. All Lasallian Catholic schools are united by a common mission and vision, rooted in the heritage of St. John Baptist de La Salle, that is accomplished by working together and by association. All members of the school community see themselves as part of the larger Lasallian Family.
6. A Lasallian Catholic school recognizes its responsibility to work with the (arch)diocese and local parishes to deepen the religious participation and commitment of those in the school.

Principle 2. Respect for All Persons: We honor and respect the dignity of all individuals.

7. A Lasallian Catholic school recognizes the presence of God in every student and treats every student with respect and dignity.
8. 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.
9. A Lasallian Catholic school respects and recognizes the unique contributions and achievements of every person in the school community.

Principle 3. Quality Education: We engage in quality education together as students, staff, and faculty by thinking critically and examining our world in light of faith.

10. A Lasallian Catholic school provides a student-centered, college preparatory education that connects the academic disciplines with the total development of each student.
11. A Lasallian Catholic school is responsive to students in need – intellectually, culturally, socially, economically, and spiritually—through innovative educational programs.
12. Educators in Lasallian Catholic schools are lifelong learners who engage in professional development in order to keep current in their fields and to meet the needs and challenges of their students' learning.

Principle 4. Inclusive Community: We celebrate diversity and welcome all members of our community.

13. 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.
14. A Lasallian Catholic school creates a welcoming, safe, and caring environment for all members of the community.
15. A Lasallian Catholic school develops caring, trusting relationships among all members of the school community.
16. A Lasallian Catholic school nurtures a culture of responsibility for one another in the school community.

Principle 5. Service with the Poor: We are in solidarity with the poor and advocate for those suffering from injustices.

17. A Lasallian Catholic school intentionally seeks out young people who are economically poor or marginalized, invites them to become students, and provides an accessible and welcoming environment to students and families.

18. 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.
 19. A Lasallian Catholic school is accessible and responsive to the needs of the wider community, especially the poor and marginalized—providing educational programming and resources.
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2. Focusing on Faith Maturing

The goal of all faith formation is forming disciples of Jesus Christ and providing a foundation for lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship. We can form disciples and promote faith growth through ten essential characteristics of Christian faith and discipleship that incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. These ten characteristics—drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research on what makes a difference in people’s lives—can form the basis of helping people discern their faith journey and needs, and help leaders accompany people through relationships, programs, activities, and resources.

Ten Faith Maturing Characteristics

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—its message, meaning, and application to life today
4. Learning the Christian story and foundational teachings of the Christian faith and integrating its meaning into one’s life
5. Praying—together and by ourselves, and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual 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.
8. Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship, ritual celebrations, and 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

An Example from the Jesuit Education Association USA

(Profile of the Graduate of a Jesuit High School at Graduation. Jesuit Secondary Education Association, 2010, <https://jesuitschoolsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Profile-of-the-Graduate-at-Graduation-2010-Revised-8.14.2015.pdf>)

Religious

By graduation the Jesuit high school student will have a basic knowledge of the major doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. Having been introduced to Ignatian spirituality, the graduate will also have examined his or her own religious feelings and beliefs with a view to choosing a fundamental orientation toward God and establishing a relationship with a religious tradition and/or community. What is said here, respectful of the conscience and religious background of the individual, also applies to the non-Catholic graduate of a Jesuit high school. The level of theological understanding of the Jesuit high school graduate will naturally be limited by the student’s level of religious and human development.

By graduation the student already:

1. has read the Gospels and encountered the person of Jesus Christ as He is presented in the New Testament.
2. has a basic understanding of the Church's teaching about Jesus Christ and His redeeming mission, as well as the embodiment of that mission in and through the Church.
3. has an understanding of the variety of the world's religious traditions.
4. is beginning to take more responsibility for exploring and affirming one's own faith.
5. is increasingly willing to let religious faith influence one's basic values, lifestyle, and vocational interests.
6. understands that being fully alive/human necessitates an active relationship with God.
7. is aware/appreciates that human life is fundamentally spiritual.
8. has experienced the presence of God (finding God in all things): in private prayer, on a retreat, in liturgical prayer, in some other moments of grace
9. is learning how to express self in various methods of prayer, especially those from the Spiritual Exercises.
10. is forming a Christian conscience, evaluates moral choices, and reasons through moral issues with increasing clarity.
11. appreciates the centrality of the Eucharist to a vibrant Christian community.
12. is learning through his or her own sinfulness of the need for healing by and reconciliation with friends, family, Church, and the Lord.
13. recognizes that any sin affects the entire human community.
14. understands the relationship between faith in Jesus and being a "man or woman for and with others."
15. knows Church teachings on moral issues and social justice.

Committed to Doing Justice

The Jesuit high school student at graduation has acquired considerable knowledge of the many needs of local, national, and global communities and is preparing for the day when he or she will take a place in these communities as a competent, concerned and responsible member. The graduate has been inspired to develop the awareness and skills necessary to live in a global society as a person for and with others. Although this commitment to doing justice will come to fruition in mature adulthood, some predispositions will have begun to manifest themselves earlier.

By graduation the student already:

1. is growing in awareness of selfish attitudes and tendencies which lead one to treat others unjustly; consciously seeking to be more understanding, accepting, and generous with others.
2. is beginning to see that Christian faith implies a commitment to a just society.
3. is growing in awareness of the global nature of many social problems such as human rights, population displacement, resource distribution, war/terrorism, etc., and their impact on human communities.
4. practices a sustainable lifestyle based on awareness of social, economic and environmental consequences.
5. is working to be environmentally responsible by limiting the use of non-renewable resources and maximizing sustainable resources.
6. is beginning to engage in the public dialogue on environmental issues, practices, and solutions.
7. is beginning to understand the structural roots of injustice in social institutions, attitudes and customs.

8. is gaining, through experiences of and reflection on Christian service, an understanding of and solidarity with marginalized members of society.
 9. is developing, from reflection on experiences with the marginalized, a sense of compassion and a growing understanding of those social changes which will assist all in attaining their basic human rights.
 10. is becoming aware, through study and reflection, of alternatives in public policy that regulate services provided to segments of the community.
 11. has begun to reflect on social justice implications of future careers.
 12. is beginning to understand the justice implications inherent in Christ's commandment to love one another.
 13. is beginning to recognize the importance of public opinion and voter influence on public policy in local, regional, national and international arenas.
 14. is beginning to understand the complexity of many social issues and the need for critical reading of diverse sources of information about them.
 15. is beginning to confront some of the moral ambiguities embedded in values promoted by Western culture.
 16. is beginning to make decisions, based on Gospel values, which sometimes conflict with the values of a materialistic society.
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A Faith Formation Plan

Faith Maturing Characteristic	Intergenerational	Family	School Community	Age Group
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—its message, meaning, and application to life today				
4. Learning the Christian story and foundational teachings of the Christian faith and integrating its meaning into ones life				
5. Praying—together and by ourselves, and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual 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.				
8. Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship, ritual celebrations, and 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				

3. Personalizing Faith Formation

We can personalize faith formation as a way to address the increasingly diverse spiritual-religious identities of people today. Personalizing learning, one of the latest educational innovations, seeks to address the diverse learning needs of people in educational settings. We can bring this innovation into faith formation. We personalize faith formation in order to address the greater diversity in religious practice and engagement among people. Personalizing faith formation provides a way to address the diverse faith growth needs of people by tailoring the faith forming environment—the what, when, how and where people learn and grow—to address the spiritual and religious interests and needs of people. It means providing variety and choice in faith formation programming, activities, and resources around the lives of people.

We know from research and experience that adults represent at least four religious-spiritual identities:

- *People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.*
- *People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is not central to their lives.*
- *People who uninvolved in a church but spiritual.*
- *People who unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.*

Spiritual-Religious Identities

Vibrant Faith and Engaged in the Congregation. A religious faith is central to the lives of the engaged. These are who are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. These are parents who are transmitting this faith to their children and are actively engaged as a family in a church community. These are children, adolescents, adults, and parents/grandparents who are spiritually committed and growing in their faith. They 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 practicing their faith at home and in daily life.

Moderate Faith Practice and Occasionally Engaged in the Congregation. These are adults and families, children, adolescents, and parents/grandparents who participate occasionally in church life—in seasonal celebrations, sacraments and milestones, major events, and age-group programs. For parents transmitting a religious faith primarily means bringing their children to educational programs at church. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low 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.

Spiritual, but Not Religious. These are adults who are spiritually engaged (relationship with God, meaningful spiritual life), but involved in organized religion and an established Christian tradition. 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. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among young adults.

Unaffiliated. For the unaffiliated religion is not personally important in their lives (and their family's life). They are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among young adults. Many adults (Millennials and Gen X) left organized religion because they stopped believing in the religion's teachings (top reason) or their family was never that religious when they were growing up or their experience of negative religious teaching about or treatment of gay and lesbian people (PRRI research, 2016). Many parents are "first generation Nones" and are now raising their children in religiously uninvolved and unaffiliated homes creating a "second generation of Nones."

We need to tailor faith formation to address these four identities at each stage of life. The days of a one-size-fits-all program are gone. No one program, class, or resource can address the diverse faith growth needs of people today. We can create personalized approaches that use the faith maturing characteristics to guide people in discerning their faith growth needs, and providing content, experiences, and activities that help them to grow from where they are

We can take each characteristic and develop a *Pathways Guide* to help people discover where they are in their faith journey using a continuum from "getting started" to "growing" to "going deeper" with short illustrations for each one. Then we can develop a personalized faith growth plan—or what educators are now calling *Playlists*—of content (print, audio, video, online) and direct experiences to address their needs.

There are two ways to design a personalized plan for faith formation. The first utilizes a *Pathways Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs and then provides *Playlists* of content, experiences, and activities to address those needs. The second approach personalizes a congregation's faith formation offerings by tailoring them to distinct faith growth needs through a variety of *Playlists* and inviting people to select the activities that best address their spiritual and religious journey.

4. Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational

We need to become intentional about strengthening the intergenerational character of our congregations and faith formation experiences. We can create a plan that:

1. *Utilizing* the intergenerational events and experiences of church life (community life events, worship and the lectionary, seasons of the year, service and mission projects, prayer and spiritual formation) as a primary "content" in faith formation by *preparing* people with the knowledge and practices for participating, by *engaging* people in the event, and by *reflecting* upon the meaning of the event and how to *live/practice* in daily life
2. *Infusing* intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing programs and activities, such as bringing mature adults into children and youth programs for interviews, storytelling, and mentoring; and transforming age-group programs (vacation Bible school, service projects) into intergenerational experiences
3. *Connecting* the generations through new intergenerational programs and experiences that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. For example, developing grandparent-

grandchildren programming—VBS, summer camp, service/mission projects, field trip; and/or creating new intergenerational learning programs, service programs, retreat experiences, camp experiences, and much more.

5. Empowering and Equipping Parents and the Family

The family provides a significant and irreplaceable role in faith formation with children and adolescents. When Christian Smith and his colleagues in the National Study on Youth and Religion looked for the factors that produced highly religious emerging adults, they focused on parents and the family as the primary (but not only) influence. They reported that through the processes of religious socialization young people with seriously religious parents are more likely than those without such parents to have been trained in their lives to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that that training “sticks” with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood.

Research studies over the past twenty years continue to affirm this truth. We know the factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and adolescents:

- parents’ personal faith and practice
- a close and warm parent-child relationship
- parent modeling and teaching a religious faith
- parent involvement in church life and Sunday worship
- grandparent religious influence and relationship
- family conversations about faith
- family faith religious practices including praying, reading the Bible, serving others, and celebrating holidays and rituals.

We all know how important parents and the whole family are in the faith forming process. Today’s families—of Gen Z children and teens, and Millennial and younger Gen X parents—present new challenges and opportunities. We will need to create new faith formation initiatives for the home, and learn from them what approaches and practices work best. There are proven strategies that can guide the development of a comprehensive plan for family faith formation including:

1. *At Home*: discovering God in everyday life, forming faith practices, and celebrating milestones and rituals;
2. *In the Faith Community*: celebrating seasonal events, encountering God in the Bible, and connecting families intergenerationally (learning, service, community life);
3. *With Parents*: developing a strong family life, and empowering parents and grandparents as faith formers. With the 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.

Nurturing Family Faith Practices

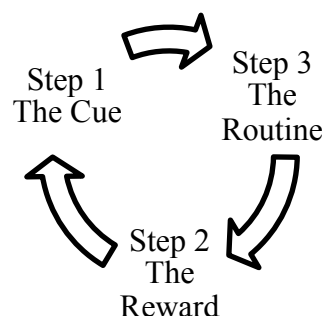
The family at home is the community where Christian faith practices are nurtured and practiced. We have discovered through research that certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and adolescents.

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. Participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family
5. Being involved in a faith community and serving in church as a family and as young people
6. Eating together as a family
7. Celebrating rituals and holidays at home
8. Having family conversations
9. Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
10. Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
11. Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
12. Providing moral instruction

Faith practices are learned and practiced as they woven seamlessly into the fabric of daily life. They can become “habits of faith.” Consider this when you woke up this morning, what did you do first? Did you hop in the shower, check your messages, put on your sneakers and workout or go for run, or have breakfast? Did you tie the left or right shoe first? What did you eat for lunch? What did you do when you got home in the evening?

Most of the choices we make each day may feel like the products of well-considered decision making, but they’re not. They’re habits. Charles Duhigg, in *The Power of Habit*, writes that at the core of every habitual pattern is a habit loop. The habit loop can be broken down into three basic steps. First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode. The cue can be internal, such as a feeling or thought, or external, such as a time of day or the company of certain people (which is why it’s easier to exercise among our running buddies, but harder to study when our friends are in the library). The second part of the habit loop is the routine, the behavior that leads to the reward. The routine can be physical (eating a donut), cognitive (“remember for the test”), or emotional (“I always feel anxious in math class”). The third part is the reward. Not surprisingly, the reward can also be physical (sugar!), cognitive (“that’s really interesting”), or emotional (“I always feel relaxed in front of the TV.”). The reward determines if a particular habit loop is worth remembering.

Here is the process of creating a habit, drawn from Charles Duhigg’s *The Power of Habit*.



The Cue: Every habit has a trigger.

- What time will this habit occur?
- Where will you be?
- What else will be around?
- What will you have just finished?
- What emotion do you think you will be feeling?

People do not need all these to create a habit. Only one of them is needed to become a cue. But the more people test out, the faster the habit takes hold.

The Reward

- What reward will you give yourself at the end of the behavior?
- Do you actually enjoy this reward? After a few days, ask: Do you crave this reward when you are exposed to the cue? After two weeks ask: Do you crave the intrinsic reward of the habit (how it makes you feel) more than the extrinsic reward (what you give yourself as a treat)?
- If yes, people have created a powerful habit. If not, people need to choose a new reward.

The Routine: This is the behavior you want to become a habit. Studies show that the easiest way to implement a new habit is to write a plan:

“When ____ (cue) _____, I will ____ (routine) _____ because it provides me with _____ (reward) _____.

People should post their plan where they will see it. Try it for a week. Eventually, studies say the new behavior will become automatic)

We can help families integrate the faith practices into their daily routine by designing activities that present the faith practices in a way that will lead toward making the practice a habit. We can design activities for a particular practice (like reading the Bible) that only take 5 or 10 minutes, suggest a variety of ways to integrate the activity into daily life, have people create a plan, and invite people to reflect on the benefits of the practice after their experience.

One example of helping families form “habits of faith” comes from Traci Smith who proposes a 7-day start up plan for integrating faith practices into daily life using the activities in her book *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*. This approach provides an immersion experience for families out of which habits can develop. Explore the other programming ideas at the end of this section.

Celebrating Milestones

A milestone is a an action or event marking a significant change or stage in development. These life and faith markers can provide important times for engaging families when they are most open to change and growth. Milestones are significant moments in life’s journey that provide the opportunity for families to experience God’s love and grow in faith through events in the life of the church community and family life. Milestones faith formation provides a natural opportunity to create a partnership between the congregation and the home. Here is a plan from Milestones Ministry (<https://milestonesministry.org>):

Children & Youth

- Birth and Baptism
- Anniversary of Baptism: Remembering our way of life
- Prayer: Relationships with God and family
- Welcoming young children to worship: An intentional invitation
- Beginning faith formation at church: First steps for a young child
- Kids and money; Good stewards of God’s gifts
- Blessing of the backpacks: A Fall milestone for all ages

- Communion: learning more about the Lord's Supper
- Bible: Placing Scripture in hands and homes
- My Body, God's Gift: Sexuality as God's good gift
- Middle school: Created in God's image
- Beginning confirmation: Walking with youth in their faith journeys
- Confirmation: An evening of honor
- Driver's license: Driver's license as rite of passage
- Mission trip: Community blessings at home and away
- High school graduation: Equipping graduates for the journey

Adults

- New job: connecting God's presence at work
- New home: Affirming the physical, spiritual, and emotional transition to a new living space
- Empty Nest: affirming adults in a new season of life
- Return from military deployment: establishing a new norm
- Marriage
- Anniversary of Marriage: remembering our promises of love and life together
- Becoming a parent: nurturing and safeguarding a child
- Faith community: life together as the people of God
- Affirming spiritual gifts: connecting passion with service
- Aging parent: affirming primary care givers
- Grandparents: From generation to generation
- Retirement: A major life transition
- Loss of a loved one: remembering God's promises for us all

Milestone faith formation can be developed around five elements: *naming*, *equipping*, *blessing*, *gifting*, and *reinforcing*.

1. *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that take place in daily life—beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage, and creating rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.
2. *Equipping* brings people together for learning, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. A family or intergenerational learning program—at church or home or in the community—prepares the individual and the whole family for the milestone and for living faith at home.
3. *Blessing* the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred. Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment: a prayer during worship for those participating in the milestone moment and a prayer at a small group or with family at home.
4. *Gifting* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.
5. *Reinforcing* the milestone with a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated.

Celebrating the Seasons of the Year

Calendar events and the feasts and seasons of the church year provide a natural rhythm for faith formation at home throughout the year. The church year seasonal celebrations can engage families

in the intergenerational life of the church, providing a natural way to connect church and home in faith formation. Consider some of the opportunities that occur each year.

Church year feasts and seasons provides an opportunity to connect home and church, and to explore more deeply the theological and spiritual meaning of the feast or season. The content and activities for the home can include rituals, learning activities, prayers, Bible reading, and ideas for action (serving, working for justice). There are an abundance of print, audio, and digital content for most feasts and seasons of the church year.

A calendar year event provides a way to connect the family with the church and/or the wider community. Calendar year events provide a way to engage in missional outreach to parents and families. Imagine hosting a blessing of the animals at church for the whole community on a weekend close to the Feast of St. Francis on October fourth. For example an event like Martin Luther King Jr. or Earth Day can involve a family activity but also engaged in a community-wide action project and a prayer service at church or in a neighboring congregation. Consider Earth Day:

Earth Day in the community: community-wide cleanup, planting a community garden, planting trees in the community, and more.

Earth Day at church: all-ages workshop on caring for creation, story time at the public library focused on environmental awareness books, an ecumenical prayer service for caring for creation, an intergenerational program on the theological and biblical foundation of caring for creation, a church energy audit, adopting a global project to address the effects of climate change, recycling activities.

Earth Day at home: planting a family garden, mealtime creation prayer, daily Bible verses on caring for creating for April, children's activities to explore and experience caring for creation, storybooks and videos on caring for creation themes, home energy and recycling audit.

Reading the Bible through the Year

One way a congregation can implement this idea is through lectionary-based faith formation programming that explores the Sunday readings in family or intergenerational settings. Churches who do not use a lectionary-based approach can adopt a multi-week sermon series that focuses on a theme connected with Biblical teachings. Programing can include whole family activities, as well as age appropriate learning activities.

A second way to implement this idea is to focus on family resources that flow from the Sunday worship experience. The key is to extend and deepen the experience of Sunday worship at home through activities, practices, and resources. This includes providing a variety of age-appropriate and whole family digital content on the church's faith formation website. Determine a focusing theme or topic that emerges from the scripture readings and make that the lens you use to select resources. Many churches now provide weekly online faith formation for families and age groups centered on Sunday worship, the readings, and the sermon.

A family faith formation plan can include the following elements, designed around the theme from Sunday worship:

- family conversation questions on the theme of the Sunday readings.

- activities for the church year feast or season (when appropriate).
- weekly table ritual.
- a podcast or video of the sermon with a study guide for the parents, children's creative Bible activities, storybooks, video presenting the Bible story.
- daily prayer, weekly family devotion.
- short bible reading for each day of the week, online resources for studying the Bible (print, audio, video).
- ideas for living the biblical teaching in the family or in the community.

Practical Strategies for Enhancing Family Faith

1. **Develop a family faith formation website.** Develop a family website with engaging family faith forming activities—print, audio, video, apps, and more—tailored to families with children and adolescents (and with parent content as well). The website serves as the resource center with content and activities and as a portal to family activities online. This is essential element of all of family strategies.
2. **Seasonal family festivals and gatherings.** Develop family gatherings or festivals around the four seasons—fall, winter, spring, and summer—or around the church year—Advent-Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost. Select a theme for each gathering such as a faith practice and/or seasonal event and/or Scripture readings. Schedule these as part of the annual calendar. Connect Sunday worship with the family festival.
3. **Connect to Sunday worship.** Find ways to connect faith practices and seasonal formation at home to readings in the Lectionary or in a sermon series, provide a short intro to living faith at home, and show people the at-home activities on the family faith formation website.
4. **Schedule a yearlong plan for milestones.** Integrate milestones formation and celebration that can be schedule into a yearly plan of church-based faith formation for each age group. For example:
 - August: Blessing of the backpacks
 - September: Beginning faith formation at church
 - October: Bible: Placing Scripture in hands and homes
 - November; Kids and money—being good stewards of God's gifts
 - February: My body, God's gift
 - March: Drivers license (for those who have and are about to receive a license)
 - April: Communion
 - May: High school graduation
 - June: Mission trip
5. **Make faith practices a seasonal focus.** Make a Christian practice the focus of a season or individual months through all family or intergenerational learning, worship and preaching, and service/action. For example, during the Lenten season the congregation and family can focus on one or more practices that reflect the theology and liturgies of the season, such as forgiveness, discernment, prayer, or transforming the world.
6. **Create family immersion experiences.** Design an extended time programs (half-day, full day) that teach faith through immersion experiences—at church or out 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.

7. **Develop a monthly seasonal event.** The seasons of the year offers a variety of opportunities for families to celebrate, learn, and have fun together. Select one family activity for each month of the year, reflecting the calendar seasons and the church year seasons, and publish the activity on the family website.

Equipping Parents and Grandparents as Faith Formers

We know that factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and adolescents include: parents' personal faith and practice, a close and warm parent-child relationship, parents' modeling and teaching a religious faith, parents' involvement in church life and Sunday worship, grandparents' religious influence and relationship, family conversations about faith, and family faith religious practices including praying, reading the Bible, serving others, and celebrating holidays and rituals. There are three components of a parent and grandparent strategy: 1) promoting their spiritual and religious growth, 2) developing their faith forming skills, and 3) equipping them with the knowledge and skills for parenting today.

Spiritual and religious growth.

This content will need to be tailored to the four spiritual-religious identities of parents—active, occasional, spiritual/uninvolved, and unaffiliated; and to the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the particular Christian tradition. This content includes, but is not limited to: developing a relationship and commitment to Jesus, experiencing the presence of God in daily life and relationships with others, praying, having Christian moral and ethical values to decide what is right or wrong, serving those in need and applying faith in the world, growing spiritually, reading and studying the Bible, and developing a well-informed Christian faith (Christian beliefs).

Faith-forming skills and practices.

This content would include, but is not limited to: having family conversations about religious topics, reading and discussing the Bible, prayer as a family and as individuals, participating in Sunday worship, celebrating family rituals and milestones, celebrate holidays and seasons, engaging in actions of service, justice, and care for creation, talking about faith and the religious tradition, and providing moral instruction and discussing moral issues.

A helpful framework for thinking about the parent faith forming skills and practices is contained in the research study by Christian Smith and Justin Bartkus. They identify three primary roles parents play in transmitting religion.

1. *Sponsor of the Faith:* Parents are the point of access between the church and their children. If children are not initially exposed to the Christian faith by their parents, they usually will not be exposed to it at all.
2. *Gatekeeper of the Faith.* Parents have nearly total control over how much and what sorts of religious content their children encounter—whether prayer, reading the Bible, or receiving Communion will occur regularly in their lives; whether they will be exposed to relationships and communities that have a religious dimension, and so forth. Parents are thus the “gatekeeper” of religious content for their children. To use another metaphor, parents are

like a faucet, determining whether religious content will arrive in children's lives at an occasional drip or in a regular flow.

3. *Interpreter of the Faith.* Parents are definitive role models, mentors, who embody a specific manner of being Christian. They teach children how to apprehend the world, how to understand what is good and what is evil, how one ought to affectively, intellectually and practically engage with the world, and so on. They do not just "represent" the faith; in many cases, they are the only meaningful embodiment of that faith in the lives of children. Parents render faith a matter of flesh and blood rather than a lifeless mishmash of doctrines and teachings. If children do not "see" the Christian faith in the "face" of their parents, they will likely never gain sufficient familiarity with it to commit to practicing the faith in the long run. (Adapted from Smith and Bartkus, 15)

Knowledge and skills for parenting.

Based on the Developmental Relationships research from the Search Institute we can identify important practices for effective parenting. This content includes, but is not limited to:

- expressing care to young people by listening to them, being dependable, encouraging them, and make them feel known and valued
- challenging young people by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential
- providing support for my young people by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow
- treating young people with respect, hearing their voice, and including them in decisions that affect them
- inspiring young people to see possibilities for their future, expose them to new experiences and places, and connect them to people who can help them grow
- demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach
- creating a warm, caring supportive family environment.
- practicing effective communication skills
- managing "screen time" and social media use
- learning effective discipline practices
- creating a warm, caring supportive family

Suggestions 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 congregation 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 congregational 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. Congregations 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. Congregations 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.

6. Generation Z & 21st Century Learning

We are learning from experience and research studies about the newest generation, *Gen Z*. It's important to remember that generations are cultural-historical ways of understanding people. They are social constructs—helpful descriptions, but never complete. Studies are emerging on some of the dominant themes or characteristics of this new generation born on or around 2000 (some observers put the date in the late 1990s, others in the early years of the 2000s.) and continuing through at least 2015 if not 2020.

Characteristics

What's important for leaders to know is that Gen Z brings new attitudes, perceptions, experiences, concerns, hungers, and interests which need to inform and shape the direction of faith formation. A 2018 study by Barna Research, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*, identified nine important characteristics of Gen Z.

1. *Technology:* The internet is at the core of Gen Z's development, a uniquely powerful influence on their worldview, mental health, daily schedule, sleep patterns, relationships and more. Devices are almost constantly on their person and on their minds.
2. *Worldview:* The world of Gen Z (and in turn, their moral code) is highly inclusive and individualistic. This diverse open-minded group of young people is sensitive to others' feelings and experiences, and wary of asserting any one view as right or wrong.
3. *Identity:* Their views of gender identity and expression are just one way teens are wrestling with how to accept and affirm other people, to create "safe space" where each person can be herself or himself without feeling threatened or judged.
4. *Security:* Gen Z has come of age in a post 9-11 nation reeling from the 2008 recession, and many teens are anxious about their future. Their goals revolve around professional success and financial security, and a majority says their ultimate aim is "to be happy"—which a plurality defines as financial success.
5. *Diversity:* As the most racially, religiously, and sexually diverse generation in American history, Gen Z expects people to have different beliefs and experiences, and they seem to have a greater appreciation for social inclusiveness compared to generations before them.
6. *Parents:* As the offspring of mostly Gen X parents, many in Gen Z appear to have a complicated dynamic with their family. They admire their parents, but most don't feel family relationships are central to their sense of self—a major departure from other generations.
7. *Religious identity:* Engaged Christians are much more likely than average to consider their religious beliefs (and, to a lesser extent, achievement and family background) very important to their identity. The one-third of teens with no religious affiliation, is by contrast, far less

likely to say that religion (12%) or family (22%) are significant factors when it comes to their self of self.

8. *Morality and values*: One-quarter of Gen Z strongly agrees that what is morally right and wrong changes over time based on society, and 21 percent believe each individual is his or her own moral arbiter.
9. *Faith and church*: Irrelevance is a key word for this generation when it comes to faith, truth, and church. Not only does Christianity stand in direct contrast with many of the beliefs and attitudes of Gen Z—on the existence of objective morality and spiritual truth, for example—but the practice of faith, especially as part of a Christian faith community, seems to many teens simply not to be relevant. It doesn't seem to have a bearing on their real day-to-day lives. (Barna, 12, 13, 43, 55, 74)

Generation Z is also learning differently than past generations. Gen Z is searching for authentic and meaningful experiences. They are more independent in how they learn. They have an aptitude for self-reliance and an ability to self-educate, and are adept at using the new digital tools and methods to learn. At the same time, Gen Z values face-to-face interaction and collaboration, and an environment where they can share with and co-create their education with their peers. The preferred way to engage a Gen Z group of learners is to provide authentic learning experiences using methods such as project-based learning, active learning, and activities that utilize their creativity, such as artwork, video presentation, and more. Generation Z loves videos and YouTube, especially short pieces of content that run from a minute to 90 seconds. For them learning is one continuous, multi-faceted, completely integrated experience.

Australian Gen Z Resources

<http://generationz.com.au>

<https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/generation-next-meet-gen-z-alphas/>

<https://www.digitalpulse.pwc.com.au/creative-authentic-mobile-gen-z/>

10 Characteristics of 21st Century Learning

We know today's younger generations learn best in environments that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. Among today's most promising educational innovations are *personalizing learning*, *blended learning* and *flipped learning*, *micro-learning*, and *immersive learning*. We can dramatically improve our effectiveness in promoting faith growth and learning by using these new practices. All of these new approaches and methods are enhanced by the use of digital technologies, methods, and media. Here are ten practices of twenty-first century learning that can guide us in designing and conducting faith formation programming for a new generation.

1. **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. Congregations 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.
2. **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. We can curate a series of micro-learning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content. Breaking content into small learning units, micro learning, will enhance comprehension and retention of knowledge, skills and practices. Generation Z loves videos and YouTube, especially short pieces of content that run from a minute to 90 seconds.

3. **Immersive learning environments** involve faith-forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. With the rise of anytime, anywhere faith formation content we need to ask: “What is the role of gathering people for faith formation?” Today children (and their parents), youth, and adults can access online most of the content that we teach at church. We have already been offering these types of experiences. We can expand our immersive learning opportunities (VBS, retreats, mission trips, and more) and focused our gathered settings on immersive faith formation in extended settings (half-day, full day, weekend, weeklong) offered throughout the year (but not weekly).
4. **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.
5. **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.
6. **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.
7. **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.
8. **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.

9. **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.
10. **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.

7. Digital Strategies for Faith Formation

We need to design faith formation with digital strategies embedded in them. We need to design faith formation that is mobile; that takes advantage of the abundance of content so we can personalize faith formation; that provides an activity or program in multiple formats so that people can learn in the way they learn best; that utilizes a website as a hub for faith formation and online classrooms for programming; and that provides micro-faith forming activities/experiences that connect together into a seamless faith formation program.

Here are five strategies for using digitally enabled strategies in faith formation.

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. One example of the type of video content for adolescents is the Video Catechism, produced by the Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, WV (vcat.org), that provides short videos for the major teachings in the Catholic Catechism. There are similar types of video program in all Christian traditions.

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.us to create webinar programming for adolescents, parents, and the whole family. For example we can create a monthly one-hour parent formation webinar program delivered to parents at home using a video conferencing program like Zoom. 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 video and/or audio recording programs 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.

8. A Guide to Personalizing Faith Formation

We can personalize faith formation as a way to address the increasingly diverse spiritual-religious identifies of people today. Personalizing learning, one of the latest educational innovations, seeks to address the diverse learning needs of people in educational settings. We can bring this innovation

into faith formation. We personalize faith formation in order to address the greater diversity in religious practice and engagement among our people. Personalizing faith formation provides a way to address the diverse faith growth needs of people by tailoring the faith forming environment—the what, when, how and where people learn and grow—to address the spiritual and religious interests and needs of people. It means providing variety and choice in faith formation programming, activities, and resources around the lives of people.

We know from research and experience that adults represent at least four religious-spiritual identities:

- *People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.*
- *People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is not central to their lives.*
- *People who uninvolved in a church but spiritual.*
- *People who unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.*

We need to tailor faith formation to address these four identities at each stage of life. The days of a one-size-fits-all program are gone. No one program, class, or resource can address the diverse faith growth needs of people today. We can create personalized approaches that use the faith maturing characteristics to guide people in discerning their faith growth needs, and providing content, experiences, and activities that help them to grow from where they are

We can take each characteristic and develop a *Pathways Guide* to help people discover where they are in their faith journey using a continuum from “getting started” to “growing” to “going deeper” with short illustrations for each one. Then we can develop a personalized faith growth plan—or what educators are now calling *Playlists*—of content (print, audio, video, online) and direct experiences to address their needs.

There are two ways to design a personalized plan for faith formation. The first utilizes a *Pathways Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs and then provides *Playlists* of content, experiences, and activities to address those needs. The second approach personalizes a congregation’s faith formation offerings by tailoring them to distinct faith growth needs through a variety of *Playlists* and inviting people to select the activities that best address their spiritual and religious journey.

Approach One: Personalize the Faith Pathways for People

A *Pathways Guide* is a process for helping people discern where they are in their faith journey and to chart a path for faith growth—to get from where they are to a closer relationship with Jesus and a deeper practice of the Christian faith.. People should be able to clearly understand where they are in their faith journey and their next steps in faith growth. They don’t have to do everything, they just need to do the one next thing. A *Pathway* focuses on faith maturing. The goal of a Pathway is to develop disciples and promote faith growth. A Pathway is created around the church’s vision of discipleship and maturing faith—identifying characteristics of faith maturing that can be used for people to discern their faith journey and chart a path for growth.

Approach One uses the ten faith maturing characteristics (or similar characteristics from your Christian tradition) to create a *Pathways Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs, and then design *Playlists* of content and experiences that address each characteristic. 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 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 intergenerational, family, and age group programming in gathered programs at church, small groups, online, mentoring, and more. The *Playlists* are published on a digital platform to make it easy for people to access them. They can also be connected to an online classroom like Google Classroom or Edmodo or Schoology.

Approach One works well around major milestones and sacrament preparation, providing a way to connect with people where they are in their faith journey and personalizing their preparation experience. Create a *Pathways Guide* for Christian initiation and new member formation, marriage, baptism, first communion, confirmation. A *Pathways Guide* can be used at the beginning of a new year of gathered faith formation programming to provide a more personalized experience for people. A *Pathways Guide* can be used with parents to discern their faith growth needs (as well as the whole family) at parent meetings and family-centered programming. It works best in an environment where you can guide people in discerning their faith growth needs and connecting them to *Playlist* that is designed for them.

Design Process

1. Identify a target audience(s): children, adolescents, parents, and/or the whole family.
2. Identify how and where you will use the *Pathways Guide*.
3. Develop the characteristics of faith growth you want to use in your *Pathways Guide*. Use the ten characteristics of maturing faith or use characteristics of faith growth specific to the content of the event or program (such as preparing for confirmation).
4. Develop a “discernment continuum” that gives people a way to reflect on their current growth. Use a faith growth continuum such as Getting Started, Growing or Making Progress, Going Deeper; or a rating scale: How true is each statement for you: 1= not true from me , 3=somewhat true for me, 5=very true for me.

Approach Two: Personalize the Faith Formation Offerings

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 or the program’s content, and tailored to the different faith growth needs of people (getting started, growing, going deeper). In Approach Two the *Playlists* provide the way to personalize faith formation. For example, to help children, adolescents, parents, or the whole family read and study the Bible, we can offer three different types of Bible content and experiences for those who are getting started, growing, and going deeper. These activities can be intergenerational, family, age group, and online. All of the content and experiences are published on a digital platform for people to access.

Example of a Playlist: Reading the Bible (Families with Children)

Getting Started

- Participate in the Bible workshop for parents that is offered twice a year
- Watch the “Reading the Bible with Children” video and/or listen to the podcast on the family website
- Begin the practice of a weekly Bible story reading and/or video viewing using the resources on the family website

- Use the online Guide to select and purchase a recommended children’s Bible, and an adult study Bible for parents
- Engage the children in the summer vacation Bible school program

Growing

- Continue the weekly Bible story or video practice
- Practice the FAITH5 each day: Share the highs and lows of the day every night; read a key Bible verse or story every night; talk about how the Bible reading might relate to your highs and lows; pray for one another’s highs and lows aloud every night; bless one another before turning out the lights of the day.
- Participate in the family scripture reflection after Sunday worship each week
- Learn how to pray with the Bible by watching the video online and using the prayer activities online
- Participate in the church wide “30-Day Bible Experience” of reading one gospel at home.
- Engage the children in the summer vacation Bible school program

Going Deeper

- Continue the FAITH5 daily practice
- Join an adult Bible study group offered by the church
- Engage the whole family in a 365 day “read the whole Bible” experience using the resources on the family website
- Develop a personal Bible study plan using the resources on the family website
- Participate in the family scripture reflection after Sunday worship each week
- Engage the children in the summer vacation Bible school program

Develop Playlists of Content & Experiences

A faith formation playlist is a curated group of digital (online, video, audio, print) and gathered (church, home, small groups, etc.) faith forming experiences and resources that are tailored to the specific faith growth needs of people around a particular characteristic of faith maturing or theme/topic. Playlists are developed for each “stage” on the discernment continuum, such as Inquiring, Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper. Each playlist provides a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith.

Developing a Playlist

1. **Select content and experiences** to address each faith maturing characteristic with activities for each category of discernment, e.g., Inquiring, Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper.
 - Incorporate intergenerational experiences
 - Incorporate family experiences
 - Incorporate age-specific experiences
2. **Using a variety of settings** or environments for faith growth: independent/individualized, mentored, at home, small group, large group, intergenerational /whole church, and world
3. **Address the ways people learn** through a variety of activities: verbal-linguistic (word / book smart), logical-mathematical (number / logic smart), visual-spatial (art / picture smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body / movement smart), musical-rhythmic (music / sound smart), naturalist

(nature / environment smart), interpersonal (people / group smart), intrapersonal (self / introspection smart)

4. Use a variety of methods

- Read
- Write/keep a journal
- Engage in storytelling and create stories
- Feature films, TV shows, videos
- Create a media project or video
- View or create art
- View or take photographs
- Watch or engage in drama
- Listen to or create a podcast
- Listen to or create music
- Conduct a demonstration
- Experience games, simulations, video games
- Analyze or create a case study
- Develop an apprenticeship or internship
- Create an exhibit
- Experience prayer and rituals
- Take a field trip
- Participate in a mission trip
- Engage in or create a service / action project
- Develop a mentor relationship

Publish Playlists

Publish the Playlists on a digital platform and use social media for connection, interaction, and sharing learning reflections. You can add the playlists to your existing church website or create a website just for faith formation and link it to your church website. Building a website is made much easier today by the availability of online website builders that provide predesigned website templates, drag-and-drop features to create webpages, and hosting for the website. Three popular website builders to explore are *Weebly* (www.weebly.com), *Wix* (www.wix.com), and *Squarespace* (www.squarespace.com). All three have easy to use features and very reasonable subscription fees. For advanced users *WordPress* (<http://wordpress.org>) provides thousands of predesigned templates, lots of customization features, and ready-to-use apps. *WordPress* does require an understanding of web design and some programming ability.

Curating Resources for Faith Formation

One of the essential skills for developing Playlists of rich content and experiences is learning how to *curate* high quality faith formation content in all forms and media that can engage people in learning and growing in developmentally appropriate ways targeted to their faith growth needs.

Curation may be a new word for many, but it has a long history. The term *curator* comes from the Latin word *curare* meaning “to care for.” Every time we visit a museum we experience the work of museum curators who acquire, care for, develop, display, and interpret a collection of artifacts or works of art in order to inform, educate, and entertain us. Museum curators are subject-matter experts who guide a museum’s overall art collection. Librarians have a similar curation task—they

curate books and media in a variety of forms, including digital—to inform, educate, and entertain us. Like museum curators, librarians have done this for centuries. The Library of Alexandria (Egypt) in the ancient world have had curators over two thousand years ago!

A content curator is someone who continually finds, groups, organizes, and shares the best and most relevant content on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. Content curators provide a personalized, high-quality selection of the best and most relevant content and resources available. They do not create more content, but make sense of all the content that others are creating.

How does curation apply to faith formation? When faith formation was a matter of selecting the right print resource or program from the right religious publisher, there was little need for curation. Leaders simply selected the right resource. But even in the era of “the resource is the curriculum,” many faith formation leaders were curators. To design home-grown programming they would search through print resource, films, and music to design a retreat or a youth meeting or an adult topical series or a parent workshop. They never thought of themselves as curators, but that is what they were doing—searching through a variety of resources, selecting the most appropriate resources to match with the needs of the people and the program, and then using the resource in the program design.

We now live in a era where there is an abundance of religious content in digital form—audio, video, apps, e-books, websites—and in print form. We are benefiting from the rise of online resource centers with freely accessible, high quality religious content and experiences that congregations, families, and individuals can access. In the new digital world of abundant resources, the role of the faith-formation leader is shifting from *providing* religious content and programming to *curating* religious content and experiences for all ages.

So what is a faith formation curator? A faith formation curator is a trusted guide who continually finds, groups, organizes, and connects the best and most relevant content and resources on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. The resources can come in many forms: people resources, programs at church and in the community, and media resources (print, audio, video, online, digital). Curation is the way that faith formation leaders connect programming with high quality resources.

We can identify three steps in the process of curating faith formation: 1) research and organize resources, 2) evaluate resources, and 3) connect the resources to programming. The research and organize phase of the process is continuous. Good curators are always searching for new resources and organizing them for future use.

Step 1. Research and Organize the Resources

The first step in the curation process is researching and reviewing resources. This is the collection phase. There’s no need to select or evaluate resources at this stage—the key is to collect as many high-quality resources for faith formation.

It is helpful to develop a list of trusted expert curators to assist you in researching and evaluating resources. We all know people in faith formation who make it part of their work to stay current with the best resources. Make a list of these people and invite them to be part of the curation support system.

It is also helpful to develop a list of high-quality online resource centers with high-quality content. Be selective—this does not have to be a long list of websites. Select resource centers with well-produced content. Review websites from national and regional denominational agencies, religious publishers, churches, and religious organizations online faith formation content. For a list of online resources for faith formation go to the “Curation” section of the LifelongFaith.com website. Be sure to subscribe to faith formation blogs and newsletters that review faith formation resources to make it easier for you to keep up-to-date on what’s new. Blogs and newsletters are produced by individuals, denominational offices, seminaries, religious organizations, and religious publishers. A good example of a faith formation blog (and online resource center) is *Building Faith* (www.buildfaith.org) from Virginia Theological Seminary.

Here is a checklist of the types of resources to research:

- People: teachers, mentors/guides, program leaders, small group leaders, guest presenters
- Community programs: churches, agencies, organizations,
- Educational institutions: colleges, seminaries, educational organizations
- Retreat and spiritual life centers, monasteries
- Regional and national denominational programs, events, and websites
- Museums
- Books (with study guides)
- E-books
- Apps
- Audio podcasts
- Audio learning programs
- Videos, feature films, and TV shows
- Video learning programs
- Online courses
- Online activities

One of the easiest ways to develop a library of faith formation resources is to create homegrown resources by saving and archiving church programming. Develop a plan for recording presentations and programs at church in audio/and or video format. Think of all of the opportunities throughout the year for recording program that can be used in other learning formats such as self-study or small group study. Consider weekly sermons, presentations, special events, concerts, and more. Develop a YouTube channel for the congregation to store and categorize all of the video recordings.

Step 2. Evaluate Resources

Every faith formation curator needs standards for evaluating faith formation resources that reflect their Christian tradition and the needs of their congregation. A set of evaluation standards needs to be developed locally. Consult denominational resources for evaluating curriculum resources. Most denominations have evaluation standards for assessing educational resources or textbooks. This can serve as a basis for developing the congregation’s evaluation standards.

Here are ten categories for developing a resource evaluation checklist. Add one or more focusing questions to each category. Try to keep the checklist short so that it is easy to use. Use the evaluation criteria to review potential resources.

1. Biblical content and interpretation
2. Theological content and emphasis
3. Developmental appropriateness

4. Ethnic-cultural appropriateness
5. Inclusive of diversity
6. Respect for diverse ways of learning
7. Appearance and visual appeal
8. Ease-of-use
9. Quality of experience
10. Ability to be incorporated into daily and home life

Step 3. Select Resources for Playlists

Select the best resources for your target audience to match with each faith maturing characteristic on your *Pathways Guide* and with the different “levels” of faith growth. Select content and experiences for your *Playlists* that include intergenerational, family age-specific, and online and digital.