

JOHN ROBERTO

REIMAGINING FAITH FORMATION
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

ENGAGING ALL AGES & GENERATIONS



Lifelong Faith Associates

CHAPTER 2



REIMAGINING THE VISION

You may recall the famous opening sequence to *Star Trek Next Generation* voiced by Captain Picard, “Space. . . . The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission, to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no one has gone before.”

This message captures perfectly the challenge for leaders in faith formation today. We need to embrace the continuing mission given to us by Jesus Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20).

The goal of nurturing Christian faith in all ages and equipping people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world has guided Christian churches for 2,000 years. “Christian faith formation is a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ. Lifelong Christian faith formation is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by scripture, tradition and reason” (*The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation*).

OUR CONTINUING MISSION: MAKING DISCIPLES, FORMING FAITH

This robust, vital, and life-giving Christian faith is holistic: a way of the head, the heart, and the hands—informing, forming, and transforming people in Christian faith and identity.

32 Reimagining Faith Formation

- *A way of the head* (inform) demands a discipleship of faith seeking understanding and belief with personal conviction, sustained by study, reflecting, discerning and deciding, all toward spiritual wisdom for life. This requires that we educate people to know, understand, and embrace with personal conviction Christianity's core belief and values.
- *A way of the heart* (form) demands a discipleship of right relationships and right desires, community building, hospitality and inclusion, trust in God's love, and prayer and worship. This requires that we foster growth in people's identity through formation and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community.
- *A way of the hands* (transform) demands a discipleship of love, justice, peacemaking, simplicity, integrity, healing, and repentance. This requires that we foster in people an openness to a lifelong journey of conversion toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and for the life of the world (see Groome, 111–119).

Congregations want Christian formation that *informs*, *forms*, and *transforms*; that immerses people into the practices and way of life of a tradition-bearing community where they can be transformed spiritually; and that engages all ages and generations in a lifelong process of growing, experiencing, celebrating, and living the Christian faith throughout life. While they may express this differently, Christian churches seek to help people:

- grow in their relationship with God throughout their lives
- live as disciples of Jesus Christ at home, in the workplace, in the community and the world
- make the Christian faith a way life
- develop an understanding of the Bible and their particular faith tradition
- deepen their spiritual life and practices
- engage in service and mission to the world
- live with moral integrity guided by Christian values and ethics
- relate the Christian faith to life today
- participate in the life and ministries of their faith community

Belonging—Behaving—Believing

How do we make disciples and form faith today? Most of us grew up with an approach that emphasized believing as the first step, then behavior, and finally belonging to a particular Christian tradition and community. Most of us are very familiar with this progression. Diana Butler Bass writes:

For the last few centuries, Western Christianity offered faith in a particular way. Catholics and Protestants taught that belief came first, behavior came next, and finally belonging resulted, depending on how you answered the first two questions. Churches turned this pattern into rituals of catechism, character formation, and Confirmation. At birth, Christian children were either baptized or dedicated, with sponsors and parents answering belief questions on their behalf, promising to teach them the faith. As children grew, Sunday schools and catechism classes taught Christian doctrine and the Bible, ensuring that each generation knew the intellectual content of the tradition. Eventually, children moved from Sunday school to “big church,” where they participated in grown-up church practices and learned how to pray, worship, sing, give alms, and act kindly. When a Christian child reached an age of intellectual and moral accountability—somewhere between seven and fifteen—the church would offer a rite of full membership in the form of Communion, Confirmation, or (in the case of Baptists) adult-believers baptism. Believe, behave, belong. It is almost second nature for Western people to read the religious script this way (201).

This approach has led people to believe that religious commitment begins when one assents to a body of organized doctrines—and that this assent to beliefs, precedes and takes priority over behaving and belonging.

This pattern is changing. We are returning to a much earlier approach, grounded in Jesus’ own ministry. “Long ago, before the last half millennium, Christians understood that faith was a matter of community first, practices second, and belief as a result of the first two” (Bass, 203).

Jesus begins his ministry with *belonging* by calling together a community—a community of disciples who were asked to leave everything and form a new community.

Jesus began with the inner life, the heart. Indeed, when he said, “You will know the truth, and truth will make you free,” he was not speaking of a philosophical idea or set of doctrines. The truth is that the disposition of the heart was the ground of truth. Spiritual freedom results from a rightly directed heart, the self as it moves away from fear, hatred, isolation, and greed toward love. And, as Jesus also said, love is shaped through a relationship with God and neighbor, steeped in self-love and self-awareness. Faith, truth, freedom—all of it—is relational, not speculative (Bass, 205).

The early community that followed Jesus was a community of practice—a community of living the Way of Jesus (*behaving*).

34 Reimagining Faith Formation

They listened to stories that taught them how to act toward one another, what to do in the world. They healed people, offered hospitality, prayed together, challenged traditional practices and rituals, ministered to the sick, comforted the grieving, fasted, and forgave. These actions induced wonder, gave them courage, empowered hope, and opened up a new vision of God. By doing things together, they began to see differently (Bass, 207).

The beliefs that guide us as Christians are embedded in the community's life and the practices that give shape to that life and faith. Belonging and behaving lead to believing.

In the biblical pattern of faith, believing comes last. Indeed, this pattern repeats in both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. From the calling of Abraham and Sarah through the great prophets and heroes of Israel to Jesus and the early church, those who walked with faith started by following, by becoming part of God's community, by enacting the practices of God's way, and finally by recognizing and proclaiming the glory of God (Bass, 209).

Relational community, intentional practice, and experiential belief are forming a new vision of what it means to make disciples and form faith in the twenty-first century. This perspective is woven throughout the vision of faith formation proposed in this chapter.

Faith-forming Processes

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:42–47).

We can discern at least *eight essential processes of forming faith*, informed by Scripture, theology, research, and contemporary reflection that promote faith growth and discipleship with age groups, families, and the whole faith community. The eight essential faith-forming processes—involving knowledge and practices of the Christian faith—facilitate faith growth *and* make a significant difference in the lives of children, youth, adults, and families. These eight faith-forming processes

are central to Christian lifelong faith formation. They provide a foundation to address the challenge of religious transmission from generation to generation, and promote lifelong growth in faith and discipleship. The eight processes include:

- **Caring relationships.** Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.
- **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 in an organic and natural sequence of faith learning.
- **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.
- **Reading 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.
- **Learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life.** Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition, reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world.
- **Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation.** Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.
- **Serving and justice.** 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.
- **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.

Writing about the educational imagination in congregational life, Charles Foster supports a view of developing proficiency in these types of processes. He writes, “An education that forms the faith of children and youth builds up and equips congregations (and their religious traditions) to be the body of Christ in the world” (126). This involves engaging young people (and their families, and all adults) in the disciplines of developing proficiency in the ecclesial practices of worshipping God and serving neighbor; involving them in the practices and perspectives, sensibilities and habits associated with being the body of Christ in ministry in the world; and preparing them to participate in and celebrate Christ’s ministry as the focus of a congregation’s education (Foster, 126).

36 Reimagining Faith Formation

It's important to remember that these eight processes are interconnected. For example: caring relationships flow through every process; worship has elements of reading the Bible, celebrating the liturgical seasons, and learning; celebrating rituals and milestones incorporate learning, prayer, reading the Bible, and worship. Maria Harris reinforces this point in her discussion of the church's educational ministry: "When we say the words of justice and do the work of justice, our speaking and doing are credible only if outreach and service are associated with the more inner-directed works of teaching, learning, and prayer. At the same time, outreach and service combined with prayer and study ensure that the work of justice will be informed and careful, based on solid thought, serious scholarship, and intelligent probing. They can make us strong in the head as well as in the heart" (Harris, 45).

These eight faith-forming processes provide essential elements for a congregation's comprehensive, lifelong plan for faith formation with age groups, families, and the whole faith community; and for family faith formation at home.

Faith-forming Processes in Research and the Christian Tradition

We see these eight faith-forming processes in research studies that give evidence to their power in forming faith with all ages and in families. For example, the research findings in *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* point to the power of the faith-forming processes within the congregation that develop maturity of faith in the lives of people.

- People experience God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.
- People learn who God is and come to know Jesus personally—learn how to be a Christian, how to discover the meaning of the Bible for their lives, and how to pray.
- People experience spiritually uplifting worship experiences that are enlightening, fulfilling, inspiring, interesting, easy to understand, and relevant in daily life.
- People develop moral responsibility—learning about Christian perspectives on moral questions and how to apply their faith to decisions about what's right and wrong.
- People are engaged in serving those who are in need, locally and globally.
- People experience a friendly, welcoming, and warm community life that provides love, support, and friendship.

We see these processes reflected in the Christian tradition. In discussing how parents can fulfill their central duties, Marcia Bunge identifies eight best practices often mentioned in the Christian tradition as ways to strengthen a child's moral and spiritual development:

1. reading and discussing the Bible and interpretations with children
2. participating in community worship, family rituals, and traditions of worship and prayer
3. introducing children to good examples and mentors
4. participating in service projects with parents or other caring adults and teaching financial responsibility
5. singing together and exposing children to the spiritual gifts of music and the arts
6. appreciating the natural world and cultivating a reverence for creation
7. educating children and helping them discern their vocations
8. fostering life-giving attitudes toward the body, sexuality, and marriage (Bunge, 14–18)

We see these processes reflected in Maria Harris’s vision of the church’s educational ministry, embodied and lived in five classical forms.

Throughout history, reaching back to Acts 2:42–47, the church’s educational ministry has been embodied and lived in five classical forms: *didache*, *koinonia*, *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *leiturgia*. If we would educate *to* all of these forms, as well as *through* all of them, then attending only to any one of them, simply would not do. The fullness of the pastoral vocation demands that any ecclesial education must be one that educates to:

- *koinonia* (community and communion) by engaging in the forms of community and communion
- *leiturgia* (worship and prayer) by engaging in the forms of prayer and worship and spirituality
- *kerygma* (proclaiming the Word of God) by attention to and practicing and incarnating the *kerygma*, “Jesus is risen,” in the speech of our own lives, especially the speech of advocacy
- *diakonia* (service and outreach) by attending to our own service and reaching out to others, personally and communally, locally and globally
- *didache* (teaching and learning) by attention to the most appropriate forms of teaching and learning in our own communities

Should any of these be left out as full partners in the educational work of ministry; should any of these be downplayed; should any of these be exalted to the denigration of others, we will not be able to educate fully. All are needed (Harris 43–44).

38 Reimagining Faith Formation

We see these processes reflected in John Westerhoff’s vision of a *community of faith—enculturation paradigm* in which Christian education uses every aspect of the church’s life for education. “A viable paradigm or model for religious education needs to focus upon the radical nature of a Christian community where the tradition is faithfully transmitted through ritual and life, where persons as actors—thinking, feeling, willing, corporate selves—are nurtured and converted to radical faith, and where they are prepared and motivated for individual and corporate action in society on behalf of God’s coming community” (45). Westerhoff identifies three aspects of community life around which we need to develop educational programs: “the rituals of the people; the experiences persons have within the community, and the actions members of the community perform, individually and corporately, in the world” (45).

These eight faith-forming processes are central to Christian lifelong faith formation. They provide a foundation to address the challenge of religious transmission from generation to generation and promote lifelong growth in faith and discipleship. They provide essential elements for a congregation’s comprehensive, lifelong plan for faith formation with age groups, families, and the whole faith community; and for family faith formation at home.

These eight faith-forming processes are woven into each of the five elements of the new faith formation ecosystem proposed described in the next section.

Eight Faith-forming Processes



SEEK OUT, BOLDLY GO: FAITH FORMATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

We need to be willing to seek out new, innovative approaches for faith formation that engage everyone—all ages and generations in all of their diversity—and to be willing *to act boldly* to bring those innovations to life. Faith formation in the twenty-first century will need to create new models, approaches, resources, and tools to address the four big adaptive challenges described in Chapter 1. We will need an innovative spirit and a firm belief that we *can* provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations across a ten-decade life cycle; that we *can* address the changing patterns of America society (ethnic cultures, generations, families); that we *can* respond to the diverse religious beliefs and practices of people today; and that we *can* create new ways to promote religious transmission from generation to generation. We are called to be faithful to the continuing mission of faith formation while at the same time creating new ways to live that mission in the twenty-first century.

A New Faith Formation Ecosystem

Among the most important tasks for twenty-first century faith formation is to create a new faith formation ecosystem for the continuing mission of making disciples and forming faith across the whole life span. What is an ecosystem? “An ecosystem is a system formed by the interaction of a community of living organisms with each other and their environment” (Dictionary.com). It is any system or network of interconnecting and interacting parts. As an example of interconnecting and interacting parts, think about Apple’s “ecosystem” of hardware and software integration—how you can move seamlessly across Apple devices (computers, phones, tablets) using the same applications and accessing your content.

For more than one hundred years in the United States, Christian churches had a highly integrated religious ecosystem. It was comprised of multigenerational family faith practice and religious transmission at home; strong congregational community relationships and church life, especially participation in Sunday worship; weekly Sunday school for children and youth (and in many cases adults); and church groups (youth, men, women). Many Christian traditions relied heavily on the ethnic faith traditions of their people to transmit faith from generation to generation—at home and at church. *And* all of this was surrounded by an American culture that explicitly or implicitly supported the Christian value system and Christian practices.

There is no way to go back to this older ecosystem. As we saw in Chapter 1, this ecosystem has eroded over the past several decades because of all the changes in the culture and society, the family, technology and communication, and more. The environment has changed, and the relationship between congregational faith

40 Reimagining Faith Formation

formation and its environment has changed. We need a new faith formation ecosystem that reflects this changed context.

The new faith formation ecosystem must be faithful to the continuing mission *and*, at the same, responsive to the challenges of the twenty-first century and the religious and spiritual needs of people today. This new ecosystem incorporates five, essential, interconnected components listed below and then explained in detail:

1. intergenerational faith formation in the congregation
2. age-group and generational faith formation in a variety of physical places and online spaces
3. family faith formation at home
4. missional faith formation to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated
5. online and digitally enabled faith formation

The eight essential faith-forming processes (see page 38) are integrated into each of these components, providing both the processes for faith formation and the content—knowledge and practices of the Christian faith—of faith formation to facilitate growth in faith and discipleship in the lives of children, youth, adults, and families across the life cycle.

Intergenerational Faith Formation in the Congregation

Intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences are at the *center* of the new faith formation ecosystem.

“Throughout Scripture there is a pervasive sense that all generations were typically present when faith communities gathered for worship, for celebration, for feasting, for praise, for encouragement, for reading of Scripture, in times of danger, and for support and service. . . . To experience authentic Christian community and reap the unique blessings of intergenerationality, the generations must be together regularly and often—infants to octogenarians” (Allen and Ross, 84).

This is the recognition that congregations themselves teach. People learn by participating in the life of a community. Practices of faith are taught through the interrelationships of worship, learning, service, ritual, prayer, and more. Among the events central to the Christian community are the feasts and seasons of the church year, Sunday worship and the lectionary, sacramental and ritual celebrations, holidays and holydays, works of justice and acts of service, times of prayer, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. A faith-forming education that is centered in the life of the Christian community is intrinsically an intergenerational experience.

Joyce Mercer, author and professor at Virginia Theological Seminary, asks the question this way: “What’s the best curriculum for forming children and youth in Christian faith?” She responds by focusing on the formative power of the whole Christian community.

We invite people into the way of life that embodies God’s love, justice, compassion, and reconciliation, by being, doing, and thinking about it together. The best curriculum for forming children, youth, and anyone else in Christian faith is guided participation in a community of practice where people are vibrantly, passionately risking themselves together in lives of faith in a world crying out for the love of Christ.

Guided participation in a community of practice puts a premium on both participation and practice. Watch children in play imitating the adults around them to see how even the youngest among us hunger to participate in the way of life they see enacted before them. That’s a good instinct to follow, because people—children or otherwise!—don’t become Christian by learning *about* what Christians do, say, or think (although at some point, particularly in adolescence and beyond, doing so can be an important part of deepening one’s faith identity). We become Christian, taking on the identity of one who is a disciple of Jesus, by acting the way Christians act, and by talking the way Christians talk. Over time through practice, even our hearts and minds are formed in this way of life.

Mercer makes the point that guided participation in practice isn’t just doing. It includes fully and actively practicing our faith in our everyday lives *and* making theological meaning out of the stuff of everyday life. In order to accomplish, we need places and ways to learn and inhabit faith stories.

Charles Foster writes, “A faith-forming education requires the interdependence of the generations” (128). This involves developing sustained patterns of intergenerational learning, relationships, and mentoring that develop young people’s identification with the faith community, give them memories of hope to enliven their future, and create their sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community and the earth” (Foster 128–130).

Foster continues, “The responsibility of mentoring the faith of children and youth belongs to the whole congregation in the full range of its ministries” (131). This involves highlighting the community as mentor/teacher in which no one, yet everyone, may move in and out of the interplay of teaching and learning, of forming and being formed. The clearest way of learning to be Christian is to participate with others in the practices of being Christian. Each member of a faith community may potentially mentor someone at the threshold of expertise in some shared community practice (Foster, 131–132).

42 Reimagining Faith Formation

The research in *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* emphasizes the power of faith-forming congregational cultures where youth and parents come to know a living and active God through their relationships with God and the community. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. The power of faithful, multigenerational Christian relationships is at the heart of a congregational culture that develops and nurtures Christian faith in all ages and generations.

Most congregations are multigenerational by membership. Some are *intentionally* intergenerational. They make their intergenerational character a defining feature of their community life, ministries, and faith formation. These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, and storytelling; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages; and to engage all generations in learning together. For these churches, being intergenerational is a way of life. It is an integral element of their culture. It is who they are!

Intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences are at the *center* of the new faith formation ecosystem. Becoming intentionally intergenerational would:

- Form and deepen Christian identity and commitment as people develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and live the Christian tradition and way of life.
- Provide a curriculum for the whole community—Sunday worship, the lectionary and church year seasons, learning, service, ritual and sacraments, prayer, and more—that is a shared experience in faith and belonging for everyone.
- Strengthen relationships, connections, and community across generations; enhance their sense of belonging in the faith community; and provide valuable adult role models for children and adolescents.
- Support families by surrounding them with a community of faith and engaging the whole family in a variety of faith-forming experiences together (caring relationships, celebrating, learning, praying, serving); and providing parents with opportunities to learn from Christians who are practicing their faith and raising faithful children.
- Strengthen the ability (confidence and competence) of parents and grandparents to promote religious socialization at home; be role models of faithful practice; and engage in faith practices at home and develop warm, affirming, and unconditionally supporting relationships between parents (and grandparents) and their children, teens, and young adults.

Charles Foster writes, “A faith-forming education relevant to the challenges of contemporary experience engages congregations in the preparation of their children, youth, and adults to participate in the events central to their identity as Christian communities” (135). A faith-forming education centered on events includes the practices of *anticipation* through stories from the past associated with the event, of *preparation* in which we develop knowledge and skill for participating in the event, of *rehearsal* of event, of *participation* in the event, and of *critical reflection* upon our participation in the event (Foster, 135–141).

Among the events central to the Christian community are the feasts and seasons of the church year, Sunday worship and the lectionary, sacramental and ritual celebrations, acts of justice and service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and the events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. A faith-forming education that is centered in the events of the Christian community is intrinsically an intergenerational experience.

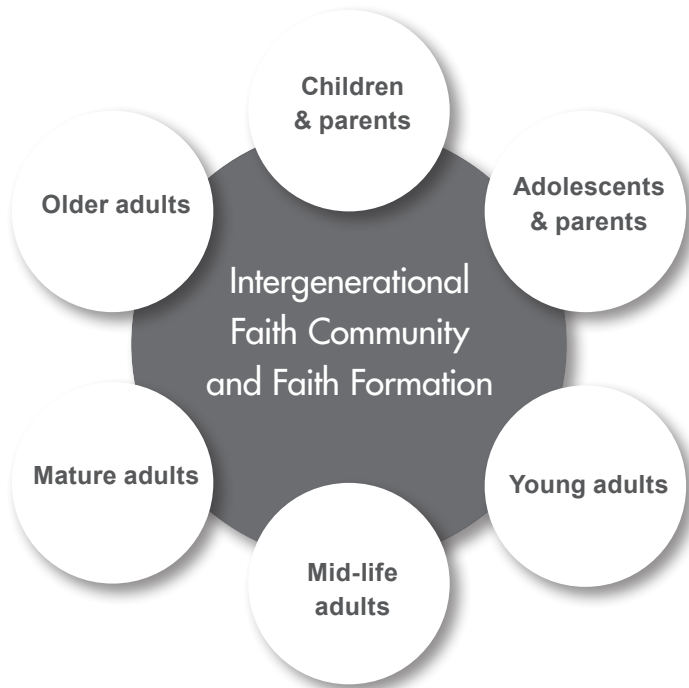
Intergenerational learning provides people of all generations the opportunity to *prepare*—with the appropriate knowledge and practices—for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith and to *guide* their participation and reflection upon those events. In a variety of formats—large group and small group—intergenerational learning provides a variety of activities to address all ages: developmentally-appropriate, experiential, multisensory, and interactive.

Age-group and Generational Faith Formation

Age-group and generational faith formation address the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of age groups and generations across the whole lifespan. Intergenerational faith formation provides whole-community experiences and learning, focused on the central events of church life and the Christian faith, while age-group and generational faith formation addresses the unique needs of each stage of life. This provides a combination of intergenerational and peer-based learning and formation.

The eight faith-forming processes are a framework for an age-specific or generationally-specific curriculum. Instead of thinking of curriculum as content or themes, organized into sequential sessions and units by grade levels with textbooks, think of curriculum as the processes and practices that contribute to growth in faith and discipleship—a far more dynamic approach than a content-driven curriculum. Instead of thinking of classes and programs, think processes—how we guide people in living Christian lives today. The curriculum plan for each age group also includes “Life Issues” appropriate to that stage of life and “Discovering Faith” for initiatives to engage the “churchless” (spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested).

Intergenerational Faith Formation and Age-group/Generational Faith Formation



Imagine an age-group curriculum designed around the eight faith-forming processes—each with developmentally-appropriate knowledge of the Bible and the Christian tradition, and experiential practice in the intergenerational faith community, at home, or as an age group. For example:

- People would 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.
- People would 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.
- People would 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.
- People would 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.

- People would 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 families, and with their church and other groups and organizations.

The age-specific curriculum engages people in the events of the intergenerational faith community—Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, sacramental and ritual celebrations, works of justice and acts of service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation—as integral to the curriculum.

Imagine a comprehensive, lifelong curriculum plan that is focused on the processes of growing in faith and discipleship that provides developmentally- and generationally-appropriate knowledge and practices; engages people intergenerationally in the life and events of the Christian community; and provides a focus for designing new programs and activities, as well as redesigning current programming, around faith-forming processes.

Family Faith Formation

The family is the single most important influence on religious transmission and faith practice—a truth demonstrated in research studies, the Christian tradition, and pastoral experience.

The reports from the National Study on Youth and Religion clearly show that the faith of parents and grandparents, their role modeling, and their teaching—both formal and informal, verbal and nonverbal, oral and behavioral, intentional and unconscious—are the key factors in developing highly religious children, youth, and emerging adults.

From the *Families and Faith* research (Vern Bengston, et al.) we learned that religious families are surprisingly successful at transmission (six out of ten parents have young adult children who report they have the same religious traditions as their parents) and that parental influence on religious beliefs and practices has not declined since the 1970s. We also learned that parental warmth is the key to successful transmission: a high-quality parent-child relationship leads to higher religiosity as demonstrated by the finding that parents who are felt by their children to be close, warm, and affirming are associated with higher religious transmission than are relationships perceived as cold, distant, or authoritarian. And we learned that grandparents will have an increasing influence on religious transmission, support, and socialization in the twenty-first century. Grandparents provide religious influence by replacing or substituting for parents' religious socialization—the

46 Reimagining Faith Formation

“skipped generation” effect, and by reinforcing or accentuating parents’ religious socialization.

Congregations need to equip families as centers of faith formation. Intergenerational faith formation and participation in church life can become a laboratory for immersing parents, grandparents, and the whole family in the Christian tradition, Christian practices, and Christian way of life. Participation in intergenerational experiences helps to develop the faith of parents and grandparents and increases their confidence and competence for engaging in faith practices at home. Intergenerational participation creates a shared experience—often missing from everyday life—of families learning together, sharing faith, praying together, serving, and celebrating rituals and traditions. Families learn the knowledge and skills for sharing faith, celebrating traditions, and practicing the Christian faith at home and in the world; and they receive encouragement for continued family faith practice at home. Congregations can then provide resources to help families share, celebrate, and practice their faith at home through the new digital technologies and media.

The family component of the twenty-first century faith formation ecosystem has three “curriculum” areas:

- nurturing family faith and developing the faith life of parents and grandparents
- strengthening family life by focusing on family asset-building
- developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents (and grandparents) for parenting

A curriculum for family faith formation utilizes the eight faith-forming processes as a framework for organizing knowledge, experiences, practices, and resources to nurture family faith and develop the faith life of parents and grandparents. First, we can focus on the whole family and design the eight faith-forming processes—with activities, practices, and resources—so that they can be embedded into the daily life of families. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow makes this same point when he writes, “Effective religious socialization comes about through embedded practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community” (Wuthnow, xxxi–ii).

Wuthnow’s list of common family activities that surfaced repeatedly in the research include: 1) eating together, especially the power of Sunday meals and holidays; 2) praying: bedtime rituals and prayer, grace before meals, family Seder; 3) having family conversations; 4) displaying sacred objects and religious images, especially the Bible; 5) celebrating holidays; 6) providing moral instruction; 7) engaging in family devotions and reading the Bible.

Wuthnow found that spiritual practices were woven into the very fiber of people’s being; it was a total immersion. For these people, being religious was a way of

life. “The daily round of family activities must somehow be brought into the presence of God. Parents praying, families eating together, conversations focusing on what is proper and improper, and sacred artifacts are all important ways in which family space is sacralized. They come together, forming an almost imperceptible mirage of experience” (Wuthnow, 8).

We need to provide a variety activities and resources for each of the eight faith-forming processes delivered in different formats, but especially in digital formats, that can reach families where they live and where they go. We now have the ability to connect with families anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time by using digital content delivered to their mobile devices (phones and tablets). Because of the abundance of faith-forming digital content now available we can provide mobile content for a family to use at the dinner table, in the car, in the morning or at bedtime, or for a mom or dad to use while waiting for their children participating in sports, music, and arts (more about this later).

Second, we need to focus on parents. Parent faith formation helps parents and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship and practice a vital and informed Christian faith. This can happen through parents’ and grandparents’ participation in intergenerational faith formation at church and participation in church life. It can also happen through targeted programs of theological and biblical formation for parents and grandparents—at church or online—in a variety of learning formats to make it easy for them to access the educational opportunities.

Parenting for faith-growth training develops parents’ and grandparents’ faith-forming skills, teaches them how to parent for faith growth, and demonstrates how to be a role model for children and adolescents in the Christian faith. This skill building can be woven into each of the eight faith-forming processes so that parents develop skills and access content for developing caring relationships, celebrating the season of the church year at home, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition, praying, reading the Bible, serving those in need, and worshipping as a family with the faith community.

A curriculum for family faith formation includes strengthening family life by focusing on the assets that build strong families. In *The American Families Asset Study*, The Search Institute identified key qualities, assets, which help all kinds of families become strong. The study found that strong families keep youth safe, help each other learn and pursue their deep interests, create opportunities to connect with others, teach youth to make good decisions, foster positive identity and values, nurture spiritual development, build social-emotional skills, and encourage healthy life habits.

The research study discovered twenty-one “Family Assets” that contribute to building a healthy and strong family life. When families have more of these research-based assets, the children, adolescents, and adults in the family do better in life. The Family Assets are organized into five categories:

48 Reimagining Faith Formation

1. *Nurturing relationships*: positive communication, affection, emotional openness, encouragement for pursuing talents and interests.
2. *Establishing routines*: family meals, shared activities, meaningful traditions (holidays, rituals, celebrations), dependability.
3. *Maintaining expectations*: openness about tough topics, fair rules, defined boundaries, clear expectations, contributions to family.
4. *Adapting to challenges*: management of daily commitments, adaptability problem-solving, democratic decision-making.
5. *Connecting to the community*: neighborhood cohesion, relationship with others in the community, participating in enriching activities, supportive resources in the community (*The American Family Asset Study*, Search Institute).

These assets can be utilized as the foundation for whole-family programs, parent programs, online resources and training, mentoring for parents, and much more—all directed toward building healthy and strong family life.

A curriculum for family faith formation includes developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents (and grandparents) for parenting.

We know from the *Families and Faith* study that parents who demonstrate a close, warm, and affirming parenting style have higher religious transmission rates than cold, distant, or authoritarian parenting styles. In “What Makes a Good Parent?” Dr. Robert Epstein identifies the ten most effective child-rearing practices—all derived from published studies and ranked based on how well they predict a strong parent-child bond and children’s happiness, health, and success.

1. *Love and affection*. Parents support and accept the child, are physically affectionate, and spend quality one-on-one time together.
2. *Stress management*. Parents take steps to reduce stress for themselves and their child, practice relaxation techniques, and promote positive interpretations of events.
3. *Relationship skills*. Parents maintain a healthy relationship with their spouse, significant other or co-parent, and model effective relationship skills with other people.
4. *Autonomy and independence*. Parents treat their child with respect and encourage him or her to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.
5. *Education and learning*. Parents promote and model learning and provide educational opportunities for their child.
6. *Life skills*. Parents provide for their child, have a steady income, and plan for the future.

7. *Behavior management.* Parents make extensive use of positive reinforcement and punish only when other methods of managing behavior have failed.
8. *Health.* Parents model a healthy lifestyle and good habits, such as regular exercise and proper nutrition for their child.
9. *Religion.* Parents support spiritual or religious development and participate in spiritual or religious activities.
10. *Safety.* Parents take precautions to protect their child and maintain awareness of the child’s activities and friends

We can provide programs, resources, and support to help parents develop effective parenting and child-rearing practices that are conducive to building strong families and promoting faith transmission—offered in a variety of learning formats to make it easy for parents and grandparents to participate.

Intergenerational Faith Community and Family Faith Formation at Home



Missional Faith Formation

Missional faith formation focuses on the spiritual and religious needs of the “unchurched” and “de-churched,” those who are spiritual but not religious or unaffiliated and uninterested in religion.

Research and descriptions of the characteristics of these two groups (see Chapter 1) are now available. Among high school youth we have seen the rise of Avoiders and Atheists (*A Faith of Their Own*). Among the young adults in their 20s and 30s we have seen the distinct profiles of the Religiously Indifferent, Religiously Disconnected, and Irreligious (*Souls in Transition*); and the Wanderers and Rejecters (*Hemorrhaging Faith*). Linda Mercadante organized the spiritual but not religious into five types (from the least to the most spiritual): Dissenters, Casuals, Explorers, Seekers, and Immigrants. This research provides the basis for developing targeted approaches and strategies for connecting with and engaging the “unchurched” and “de-churched.”

Barna Research asked the unchurched to rate how much influence thirty different approaches had on their interest in attending a church. The three approaches that seemed to have the most positive effect were:

- developing relationships through an invitation from a trusted friend
- an appealing event—such as a concert or seminar—hosted at the church
- reputational appeal as reflected in ministries that serve the poor and providing mentoring and development for young people

Two additional ideas had moderate appeal:

- participating in a house church rather than conventional church ministry
- participating in a gathering of people from their same age group and general lifestyle (Barna and Kinnaman, 155–159)

Missional faith formation expands and extends the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live—moving faith formation out into the community.

This involves developing targeted approaches and strategies designed around the particular needs and life situations of the unchurched and de-churched. These approaches and strategies need to be contextual—built around the congregation, community, and the needs of people. Missional faith formation can reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested by using adaptable strategies, such as the following:

- Developing community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses

- and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
- Opening church events and programs to the whole community such as vacation Bible school.
 - Creating a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page to connect with people.
 - Connecting with people's life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
 - Connecting with people during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, and more.
 - Developing high-quality, relationship-building events designed to draw people from the wider community into relationships with people from your church such as social events, concerts, service projects, and children's programs.
 - Organizing small groups on a variety of themes from life centered to faith centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
 - Sponsoring community-wide service days and service projects that are open to everyone.
 - Creating digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars that are offered online.

Missional faith formation provides pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community. Congregations need to develop intentional and deliberate faith formation approaches that move people from discovery to exploration to commitment. Here are four examples that illustrate pathways for people to move from belonging to behaving to believing.

1. The *Catechumenate* of the early church, now restored for the contemporary church, provides a guided process moving from evangelization (inquiry) to catechesis (formation) to spiritual discernment (during Lent) to a ritual celebration of commitment (Baptism-Eucharist-Confirmation at the Easter Vigil) to post-baptismal faith formation (mystagogy). The formation component provides a holistic learning process: formation through participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation, development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. The journey from inquiry through formation to commitment

52 Reimagining Faith Formation

and a life of discipleship within a faith community is a process that can be applied to all types of situations and settings for people of all ages.

2. The *Alpha Course* covers the basics of Christianity, addressing questions like: Who is Jesus? and Why did he die? The Alpha course usually lasts ten weeks, with a day or weekend getaway in the middle. Each week, guests gather for about two hours. They share an informal meal, sing a few songs, listen to a talk on how Christianity approaches the question at hand, and then gather into small groups for discussion. The talks each week act as a springboard for small group discussions. Alpha is an open door to people outside the church. It's a way for those who are not believers or churchgoers to come and learn what Christianity is all about. It's informal and relaxed so people can drop their defenses and ask their questions. It's about exploration and discovery.
3. *Christian Life and Service Seminars* (C.L.A.S.S.) is offered by Saddleback Church to teach people what it looks like to follow Christ and give them tools they need for each step of the journey. Class 101 is an introduction to Saddleback Church, what the church believes, and how to become a member of the Saddleback family. In Class 201 people find out what it means to be more like Jesus, learn how to spend time with God through prayer and Bible study, discover the importance of tithing, and understand the value of community. In Class 301 people learn how God can use their spiritual gifts, heart (passions), abilities, personality, and experiences to help to others. Class 401 helps people discover their calling, learn how to share their story with others, write down their personal testimony, and see how to impact the world with Christ's love.
4. *Lifetree Café* offers people the opportunity to gather in warm and hospitable venues to explore life and faith. Simply put, it's a "conversation café"—a place and time for people to gather weekly to experience stories and talk about thought-provoking topics relating to life and faith. The hour-long Lifetree Café experiences feature stories of real people, guided conversation, biblical insights, time to build relationships with new and old friends, laughter, fun, and opportunities to serve. Lifetree brings people together to explore important and intriguing life issues, serve the community, and experience God through Jesus Christ.

Online and Digitally Enabled Faith Formation

The digital revolution has transformed almost every aspect of society. No facet of this revolution has more potential than its ability to change the way people learn. The availability of a vast array of knowledge and resources at the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen, together with the ability to connect instantaneously with peers and mentors across the street and around the world, make possible completely new learning environments and experiences. These opportunities are highly engaging and collaborative, and they are based on learners' own interests and strengths. People can truly learn anytime, anyplace, and at any pace today.

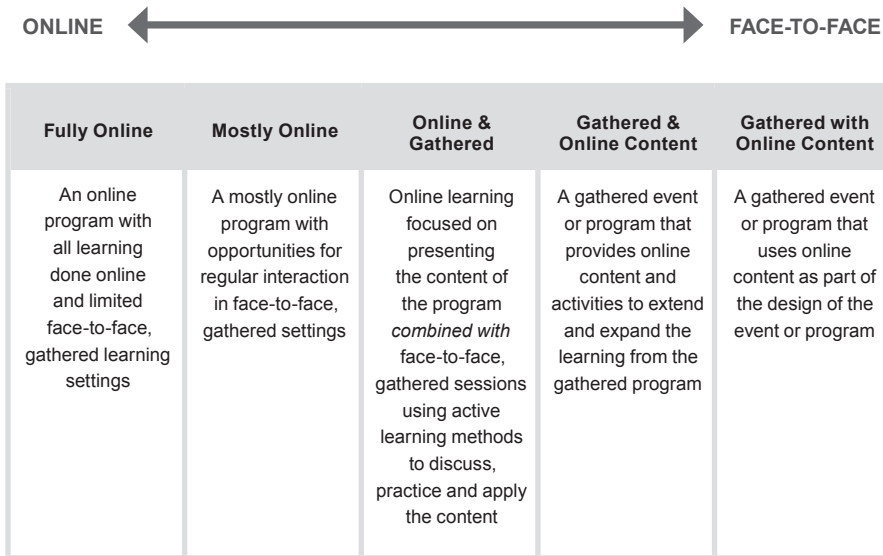
We have never had access to better technologies and resources for nurturing growth in Christian faith with all ages and equipping people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today. The new technologies and resources of the digital era provide tremendous opportunities for congregational faith formation to thrive in the twenty-first century. Just as an earlier era adopted the new technologies of the day—schooling and the printing press—to produce educational models using classrooms and teachers, catechisms and textbooks, the twenty-first century has digital technologies, tools, and media that can be utilized to create new models that will transform faith formation in a congregation.

We need to embrace **the abundance of new digital technologies and media for learning and faith formation** that is unprecedented in history—the Internet, Wi-Fi and broadband connectivity, interactive web platforms, mobile devices (phones, tablets, laptops), digital video websites (YouTube and more), social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more), online conferencing (Skype, Google+ Hangouts, and more), and digital tools for creating online classrooms, videos, games, etc.

We need to utilize **the abundance of high-quality digital religious content and experiences** found in websites, blogs, apps, e-books, video, and much more—created by individuals, publishers, congregations, religious organizations—and often free.

We need to create **new models of faith formation that utilize the digital technologies and digital media** to engage people with faith-forming content anytime, any place, just-in-time; and that can extend and expand faith formation in physical, face-to-face settings into people's daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. We can develop blended models of faith formation that incorporate physical settings and online settings. These settings can be seen as a continuum: ranging from fully online programming to gathered programming in physical settings that use online resources. Blended faith formation usually combines online delivery of religious content and experiences with the best features of gathered face-to-face programs. Here is a view of the five models on a continuum (more about this in Chapter 3).

Blended Faith Formation Continuum



CONCLUSION

There is no going back to the old faith formation ecosystem. We now have “to boldly go where no one (in congregational faith formation) has gone before.”

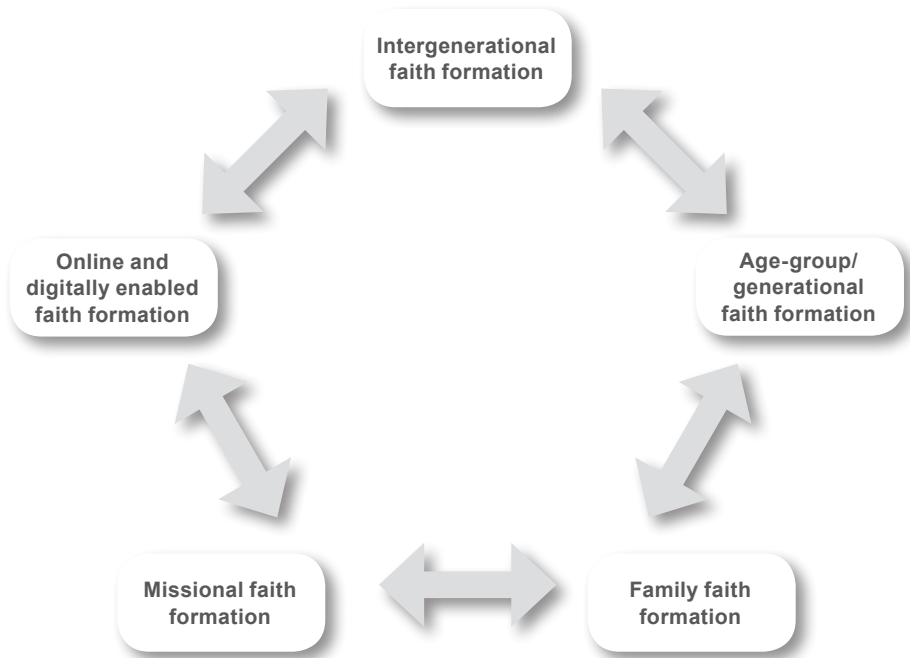
We *can* provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations across a ten-decade life cycle. We *can* address the changing patterns of America society (ethnic cultures, generations, families). We *can* respond to the diverse religious beliefs and practices of people today. We *can* create new ways to promote religious transmission from generation to generation.

The new faith formation ecosystem provides us with an approach that addresses these challenges through its five interconnected components:

- intergenerational faith formation in the congregation
- age-group and generational faith formation in a variety of physical places and online spaces
- family faith formation at home
- missional faith formation to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated
- online and digitally enabled faith formation

Each component makes an important contribution to a comprehensive approach to faith formation with all ages and generations. To review the faith-forming ecosystem in your congregation, use the “Reimagining Faith Formation” Assessment Tool (on page 134) with church staff and faith formation leaders. (It also is available online at www.21stCenturyFaithFormation.com.)

The New Faith Formation Ecosystem



A new model of faith formation and learning can bring to life interconnected components of the new faith formation ecosystem in a practical way for congregations. Chapter 3 introduces a network model of faith formation that seeks to do just this.

Works Cited

- Allen, Holly and Christine Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012.
- Alpha USA. The Alpha Course (<http://guest.alphausa.org>; and http://www.alphausa.org/Groups/1000060778/For_my_Church.aspx)
- Barna, George, and David Kinnaman. *Churchless*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2014. (also <https://www.barna.org/churchless#.VMdqTcZLzds>)
- Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity after Religion*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012.
- Bengston, Vern with Norella M. Putney and Susan Harris. *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bunge, Marcia. "Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices for Faith Formation." *Understanding Children's Spirituality*. Edited by Kevin Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation*. The Episcopal Church, July 2009. (www.episcopalchurch.org/sites/default/files/downloads/formationcharter_8.5x11_f.pdf.)

56 Reimagining Faith Formation

- Dollahite, David, and Loren Marks. "How Highly Religious Families Strive to Fulfill Sacred Purposes." *Sourcebook on Family Theories and Methods*. Edited by Bengston, V., D. Klein, A. Acock, K. Allen, and P. Dilworth-Anderson. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.
- Epstein, Robert. "What Makes a Good Parent?: A Scientific Analysis Ranks the 10 Most Effective Child-Rearing Practices." *Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2010, (pages 46–51).
- Foster, Charles. *From Generation to Generation: The Adaptive Challenge of Mainline Protestant Education in Forming Faith*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Fuller, Buckminster. "Quotes." (http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/165737.Buckminster_Fuller)
- Groome, Thomas. *Will There Be Faith: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.
- Harris, Maria. *Fashion Me A People*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1988.
- Lifetree Café. (www.lifetreecafe.com.)
- Martinson, Roland, Wes Black, and John Roberto. *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*. St. Paul: EYM Publications, 2010.
- Mercadante, Linda. *Belief with Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Mercer, Joyce Ann. "Cultivating a Community Practice." Patheos.com, August 13, 2013. (www.patheos.com/Topics/Passing-on-the-Faith/Community-Practice-Joyce-Ann-Mercer-08-14-2013.html.)
- Pearce, Lisa D., and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *A Faith of Their Own*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Pink, Daniel. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York: Riverhead, 2009.
- "Re-imagining Learning in the 21st Century." MacArthur Foundation, Digital Media and Learning Network, 2010.
- Saddleback Church. Class 101–401. (<http://saddleback.com/connect/ministry/class>)
- Smith, Christian with Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Syvertsen, Amy, K., Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, and Peter C. Scales. *The American Family Assets Study*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2012. (<http://www.search-institute.org/research/family-strengths>)
- Westerhoff, John. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* New York: Morehouse, 2012.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *Growing Up Religious*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

CHAPTER 3

REIMAGINING THE MODEL

*You never change things by fighting the existing reality.
To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.*
(Buckminster Fuller)

We are witnessing transformations in the way we think about learning, reflecting the convergence of new technologies, digital media and tools, and network thinking. The MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning Project identified three major transformations:

A shift from education to learning. Education is what institutions do—learning is what people do. Digital media enable learning anywhere, anytime; formal learning must be mobile and just-in-time.

A shift from consumption of information to participatory learning. A new system of learning must be peer based and organized around learners' interests, enabling them to create as well as consume information. It encourages learners to experiment and create, to produce and design things.

A shift from institutions to networks. In the digital age, the fundamental operating and delivery systems are networks, not institutions such as schools, which are a node on a person's network of learning opportunities. People learn across institutions, so an entire learning network must be supported ("Re-imagining Learning in the 21st Century").

58 Reimagining Faith Formation

A revolution in technology has transformed the way we find each other, interact, and collaborate to create knowledge as connected learners. What are connected learners? Learners who collaborate online; learners who use social media to connect with others around the globe; learners who engage in conversations in online spaces; and learners who bring what they learn back to inform their schools, workplaces, communities, and the world.

The “Connected Learning” approach developed by a team at the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub and supported by the MacArthur Foundation provides insights into the transformation of learning in the digital age. Connected Learning is anchored in research, robust theories of learning, and the best of traditional standards, but also designed to mine the learning potential of the new social and digital media domain. It harnesses the advances and innovations of our connected age to serve learning. Just as earlier generations tapped the tools of their time to improve learning, we must do the same in the digital age.

The Connected Learning approach can be summarized in the following characteristics:

Interests. Interests foster the drive to gain knowledge and expertise. Research has repeatedly shown that when the topic is personally interesting and relevant, learners achieve much higher-order learning outcomes. Connected learning views interests and passions that are developed in a social context as essential elements.

Peer Culture. Connected learning thrives in a socially meaningful and knowledge-rich ecology of ongoing participation, self-expression, and recognition. In their everyday exchanges with peers and friends, young people fluidly contribute, share, and give feedback. Powered with possibilities made available by today’s social media, this peer culture can produce learning that’s engaging and powerful.

Production-centered. Connected learning prizes the learning that comes from actively producing, creating, experimenting, and designing because it promotes skills and dispositions for lifelong learning, and for making meaningful contributions to today’s world.

Shared purpose. Today’s social media and web-based communities provide unprecedented opportunities for children, youth, adults, parents, and teachers to share interests and contribute to a common purpose. The potential for cross-generational learning and connection unfolds when centered on common goals.

Openly networked. Connected learning environments link learning in school, home, and community because learners achieve best when their learning is reinforced and supported in multiple settings. Online platforms can make learning resources abundant, accessible, and visible across all learning settings (Ito, et al.).

Connected Learning is active, relevant, real world, effective, hands-on, networked, innovative, personal, and transformative. It connects three critical spheres of learning: academics, a learner’s interests, inspiring mentors and peers. (See the appendix Connected Learning Principles on page 81.)

Another important trend is the personalizing of learning, facilitated by learning networks, digital content, social connectivity, and devices to connect with the content and people. Katherine Prince has outlined the features of a “Vibrant Learning Grid” in which educational leaders can create a flexible and personalized learning ecosystem that meets the needs of all learners. She describes several of its key features:

- Learners will move seamlessly across many kinds of learning experiences and providers, with teachers and learning guides supporting them in customizing and carrying out their learning journeys.
- The ways in which we organize learning will diversify, with “school” taking more forms.
- Learning will no longer be defined by time and place—unless a learner wants to learn at a particular time and in a particular place.
- Learners (and their families) will create individualized learning playlists reflecting their particular interests, goals, and values. Those playlists might include schools but also a wide variety of digitally mediated or place-based learning experiences—at museums, science centers, libraries, and more (Price 16–17).

At the heart of this transition to twenty-first century learning is the question: What if learning adapted to each person instead of expecting each person to adapt to the school or the curriculum or the program?

The central themes of the transformation in learning need to be central features of congregational faith formation: putting learners at the center of our thinking; enabling and trusting learners to be co-creators of their learning experiences; connecting learning authentically to life concerns and real world issues; making room for new modes of learning and new methods of teaching; fostering collaboration in learning; and organizing structures around learners’ needs.

Congregations can embrace the transformations happening in the world of learning. We will need a new model that embodies the best developments in learning and brings to life the interconnected components of the new faith formation ecosystem in a practical way.

A NEW MODEL: THE FAITH FORMATION NETWORK

In an earlier era if you wanted to learn more about the Bible, you could take a Bible course at a fixed time—at a church, seminary, college, or other education provider, or read a book—perhaps recommended by your pastor and borrowed from your

60 Reimagining Faith Formation

church's library, or watch a video—on VHS of course! Your options would have been limited. In the twenty-first century if you want to learn more about the Bible, your options are greatly expanded. You could do any combination of the following:

1. Take a course at church or college or seminary.
2. Take a course online—at a scheduled time with a group or at your own time and pace.
3. Read and view videos online at a Bible website, such as www.entertheBible.org from Luther Seminary.
4. Join an online Bible study group at another church or on Facebook.
5. Watch a video series on YouTube from a scripture scholar, such as N.T. Wright, as you read his book or watch a video series produced by another congregation that is available for free on their website.
6. Find a mentor in your community or online who will guide your self-directed Bible study.
7. Listen to audio versions of your book(s) using your smartphone as you commute to work each day.
8. Download a Bible study app, engage in daily Bible readings and reflections, and share your reflections with others who are studying the Bible using the app and social media.
9. Create a blog to post your thoughts on what you are learning and invite others to offer their insights.
10. Organize your own learning group by gathering a group of people who are interested in learning more about the Bible and using print, audio, video, and online resources to guide your small group.

In this example we see the shift to a networked approach to learning for an individual. Learners now have the ability to construct their own networks of learning, utilizing a variety of new technologies and the abundance of high-quality print, audio, video, and online resources that are readily available to them. Learning networks not only provide access to a virtually endless array of learning opportunities, but can offer learners multiple points of entry that provide individualized pathways of learning and faith growth.

What if we reimagined congregational faith formation as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces? This networked model of faith formation is *lifelong*—each stage of life from birth to death—and *life-wide*—everywhere, anytime learning within a network of mentors,

teachers, family, and peers. It provides a wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences in online and physical settings (home, congregation, community, world). It offers faith formation content and experiences to respond to the diverse religious and spiritual needs of people today—from the spiritually committed and engaged to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. It enables congregations to become centers for lifelong learning and faith growth for *all* people by utilizing the best of the new digital technologies to bring an abundance of meaningful and engaging faith-forming experiences—in the congregation and the world, and in a variety of media—to people of all ages.

Adopting a network approach to congregation faith formation reflects the fact that we are living in the age of networks.

Networks are everywhere. The brain is a network of nerve cells connected by axons, and cells themselves are networks of molecules connected by biochemical reactions. Societies, too, are networks of people linked by friendships, familial relationships and professional ties. On a larger scale, food webs and ecosystems can be represented as networks of species. And networks pervade technology: the Internet, power grids and transportation systems are but a few examples. Even the language we are using to convey these thoughts to you is a network, made up of words connected by syntactic relationships (Barabasi and Bonabeau, 52).

Images of networks appear in the Scriptures. Jesus uses the image of the vine and branches to describe his relationship with the disciples (church) and their relationship with him: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. . . . Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:1, 4–5).

Paul uses the image of the body to describe the early Christian community. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

We are all part of networks—our families, our schools, our workplaces, our religious congregations, our social circles, our online life. Networks—collections of people (and their resources) connected to each other through relationships—aren’t new. They’re as old as human society.

What is new is that in the twenty-first century this understanding of networks has been expanded to include the digital network of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and the new social media platforms and tools. New tools and technologies are changing the way we communicate and connect. The changes can be seen in

62 Reimagining Faith Formation

the way people are working together to create and disseminate knowledge. The shift is not just in the new Web 2.0 technologies. It's in the way that increasingly widespread access to these tools is driving a fundamental change in how groups are formed and work gets done. Today we can turn to people, organizations, and resources anywhere in the world to help us answer questions, connect to relevant content and resources, or just share our life experiences and stories. These new approaches to connecting people and organizing work are now allowing us to do old things in new ways and to try completely new things that weren't possible before.

Another way to view the network vision of life and church is Keith Anderson's image of the *digital cathedral*, which evokes "an expansive understanding of church in a digitally-integrated world, one that extends ministry into digital and local gathering spaces, recognizes the holy in our everyday lives, and embodies a networked, relational, and incarnational ministry leadership for a digital age."

In fact, the cathedral was not just a monumental building, as we often think of it today, but rather a networked, relational, incarnational community that included people with a surprising range of beliefs and practices. Within premodern cathedral grounds were breweries and bakeries, granaries and gardens, monasteries and markets. Beyond the walls, the cathedral proper extended to the forests, fields, and villages where a diverse array of ordinary believers found the sacred in their waking and their sleeping, their toils and their leisure. People lived life fully "in cathedral"—in relationship to one another within an expansive, everyday understanding of "church."

Well, today, the places that are "in cathedral" are both local and digital—coffee shops, pubs, and parks; Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—as well as in the digitally-integrated connections people with smartphones and tablets make between their local participation and their digital networks.

What if we were to reclaim this larger sense of "cathedral" and "church"—one that encompasses our daily working and living, that includes both local spaces like pubs, coffee shops, and parks, but also digital gathering spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube? How can we understand all of these online and offline spaces as part of an expansive, networked whole? And how would this shift our practice of ministry, our leadership, and our assumptions about the loci of spiritual practice?

In this view, the spiritual life experienced "in cathedral" would include not just worship at the local church building, but also a family bustling through breakfast on the way to school and work. It would extend to bus stops, classrooms, coffee shops, offices, cafés, and so on, all of these holding the potential of further connection through smartphones, tablets, and

laptops. In this digital cathedral, any node in the network can mediate the divine in everyday life, can function as sacred space. Here, our lowly digital devices invite pilgrimage every day across these networked sacred spaces.

Imagined this way, the digital cathedral is not a call to return to a time when church was at the center of the culture—even if that were possible. Rather, it is a warm, digitally-integrated embrace of the rich traditions of Christianity, especially the recovery of the premodern sense of cathedral, which encompassed the depth and breadth of daily life within the physical and imaginative landscape of the church.

Anderson's understanding of the digital cathedral is a great way to imagine a networked approach to life, learning, and church. (See his book *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*.)

Twenty-first century faith formation will look and feel and operate as a network. It will no longer resemble the linear, one size fits all model of the industrial age. As a network it will provide a diversity of religious content and experiences for all ages and generations, 24x7x365, in face-to-face (physical) and online (virtual) settings. It will incorporate an immense range of faith formation opportunities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH FORMATION IN A NETWORK MODEL

Variety of Content, Method, Format, and Delivery

In a network model, faith formation is designed around the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of individuals and families across the whole life span.

We are moving from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determined the curriculum to a *learner-centered model* where the content and experiences are designed around the people and where they have control over their learning. Individuals and families have an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along personal trajectories of faith growth. A faith formation network provides a congregation with a means to offer relevant content that addresses the spiritual and religious needs of people *and* the ability for them to engage with that content in ways that reflect how they learn and grow best. A network approach provides more options for people of all ages to find programs, activities, and resources that match well with how they learn and grow in faith.

Faith formation provides a variety of learning experiences that can engage the whole person in learning. Faith formation networks address the whole person and how they learn best by offering programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different “intelligences”—word-centered, verbal-linguistic, logical, musical, visual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and bodily-kinesthetic (see the work of Howard Gardner). While it may be difficult to incorporate all eight intelligences in a particular program or activity, a network approach provides a way to offer programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different “intelligences”—one that is word-centered, another musical, another visual, etc.—so as to engage as many people as possible.

People have different learning styles. Some learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences; some through reflective observation; some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts; and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices. A network provides a way to offer programs reflecting the four different learning styles, such as immersion programs, workshops, presentations, small group study, and retreat experiences to name a few.

Faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces, and conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world. We are moving from the one size fits all curriculum and programming of an earlier era to a variety of religious content—experiences, programs, activities, and resources—that connects with people’s spiritual and religious needs. A network approach gives us the ability to offer activities that target the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of individuals, families, and groups. We no longer have to worry about reaching a mass audience with one size fits all programming. We can diversify faith formation offerings and tailor them to people’s needs and busy lives.

This movement from one size fits all to a variety of faith formation offerings is made possible by the abundance of religious content—print, audio, video, online, and digital—and programming that is now available. And this is made possible by the creation of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and programming with a variety of ways to learn and that is easily accessible and available, anytime and anywhere. In the network model faith formation becomes personal, portable, and participatory—the key characteristics of the mobile technology revolution.

A faith formation network incorporates seven learning environments, in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. The seven environments provide a way to offer the same content or program in multiple learning environments, giving people different ways to learn and grow in faith. The seven environments include:

- on your own (self-directed)
- with a mentor
- at home
- in small groups
- in large groups
- in the congregation
- in the community and world

A variety of learning methods can be used with each of these seven learning environments. Creating this variety of learning environments is aided by the development of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the faith formation offerings.

Faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning. Informal learning describes a lifelong process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge from daily experience and the educational influences and resources in their environment, from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library, the mass media, and the Internet. Informal learning can be intentional or not. There might be a teacher, but it's probably a colleague or friend. We might read an article or book, visit a website, listen to a podcast, or watch a video online. We might visit Home Depot or Lowe's for a clinic on home repair or gardening or stop by our local bookstore or library for a reading group or special program. We might go online to access any one of the thousands of "how to" videos on YouTube. We might watch one of the TV channels devoted to informal learning, such as cooking channels that teach people how to cook and try new recipes or home improvement shows that present examples and teach techniques.

Both formal and informal learning can be *intentional*—when an individual aims to learn something and goes about achieving that objective or *unexpected*—when in the course of everyday activities an individual learns something that he or she had not intended or expected. Most faith formation programs are formal and intentional learning. We can expand *informal* and *intentional* faith formation when we make available a variety online activities, print resources, audio podcasts, videos, apps, and more that people can access on their own, anytime, anywhere.

Personalized Learning and Faith Growth

Faith formation provides the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving people an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. People are guided by trusted guides who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs.

We know from learning sciences research that more effective learning will occur if each person receives a customized learning experience. People learn best when they are placed in a learning environment that is sensitive to their learning

66 Reimagining Faith Formation

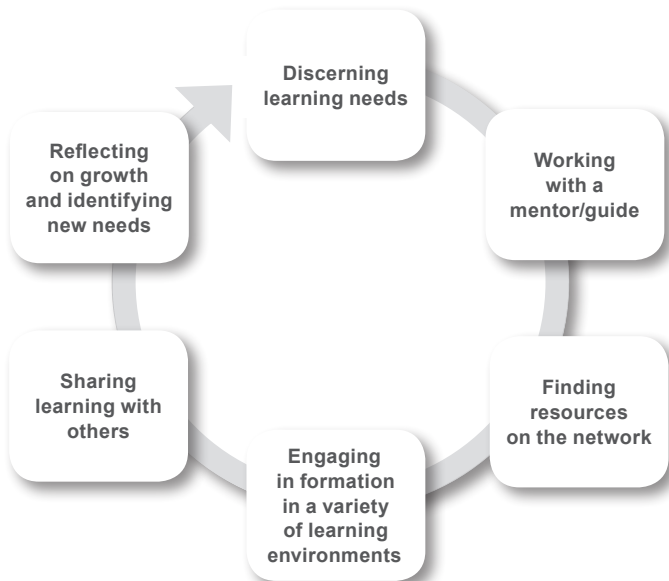
needs and flexible enough to adapt strategies and resources to individual needs. We can now meet people at the point of their spiritual, religious, and learning needs and offer personalized pathways for faith growth.

A faith formation network, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, can guide people in creating their own personal learning pathways. Churches can develop processes for helping individuals and families diagnose their religious and spiritual learning needs (online and in person) that:

- discern learning needs
- create a plan (with a mentor/guide) for faith growth and find resources on the network
- engage in faith formation experiences
- reflect on [their] learning with a mentor/guide or small group
- identify new needs for growth and learning

A “faith-growth learning plan” helps people identify where they are on their spiritual journey, what they need for continuing their growth, who else might share that need, and the resources that could help them meet that need. Giving power to individuals and families to shape their own learning does not mean abandoning them to their own devices. Congregations provide mentors or guides to assist people in developing their growth plan, accessing the programs and resources that fit their plan, and evaluating their learning.

The Flow of Personalized Learning



Imagine redesigning confirmation by moving from a one-size-fits-all approach to a personalized approach using a network. Imagine beginning with discernment so that young people, with the help of a mentor, can talk about their faith journey; then determining the content and activities from the “confirmation network” that are most appropriate to their religious and spiritual needs; participating in those activities—on their own, with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and/or in the community and world; and then reflecting with their mentor on their growth.

A Process of Active Inquiry and Intrinsic Motivation

Faith formation recognizes that learning is a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual. Faith formation networks recognize that the motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning.

The traditional model of schooling has conditioned people to perceive the proper role of learners as being dependent on teachers to make decisions for them as to what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it has been learned. Today people are accustomed to searching out what they want to know, when they want and need to know it. People are becoming more and more self-directed in their learning, and they have almost unlimited access to information through the Internet and the wide variety of print and media learning resources available in our society today.

As learning becomes a process of active inquiry, where the initiative resides within the person, intrinsic motivation becomes a key factor in determining whether or not people will engage in faith formation and open themselves to learning and faith growth. Extrinsic motivation, such as faith formation participation policies (such as required hours or things that must be done in order to receive a sacrament), rarely motivate people to participate, learn, or grow in faith. In fact, they usually have the opposite effect.

Drawing on decades of scientific research on human motivation, Daniel Pink in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* exposes the mismatch between what research shows and how we motivate people. While carrots and sticks (policies and requirements) worked somewhat successfully in the twentieth-century, assembly-line model, that’s precisely the wrong way to motivate people today. He describes three types of motivation: Motivation 1.0 presumed that humans were biological creatures, struggling for survival. Motivation 2.0 presumed that humans responded to reward and punishments in their environment. Motivation 3.0 presumes that humans have a third drive—to learn, to create, and to better the world. Motivation 3.0 has three essential elements.

Autonomy: the desire to direct our own lives with autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), team (who they do it with), and technique (how they do it).

Mastery: the urge to get better and better at something that matters—to be engaged in deliberate practice to produce mastery.

Purpose: the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves, to seek purpose—a cause greater and more enduring than ourselves.

Daniel Pink writes, “The secret to high performance and satisfaction—at work, at school, and at home—is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world (145).” Learning and growth in a faith formation network is a process of active inquiry, where the initiative resides within the person. Intrinsic motivation—autonomy, mastery, purpose and meaning—become key factors in determining whether or not people will engage in faith formation and open themselves to learning and faith growth.

Here is one example of how autonomy and mastery combine to motivate learners. A recent research study found that students want control of their own learning. When asked why learning through an online class might make school more interesting, 47 percent of students in grades 9–12, 39 percent in grades 6–8, and 25 percent in grades 3–5 responded that they wanted to learn online to control their own learning experience. Students do not expect online courses to be easier. They do, however, expect the online learning environment to facilitate their success because they can review materials when they want and are more comfortable asking teachers for help. And online teachers see great benefits to student online learning: 76 percent believe that online learning benefits students by putting them in control of their own learning.

Communities of Faith Learning and Practice

Faith formation intentionally nurtures communities of learning and practice around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities of individuals and families.

Faith formation can connect individuals and families to each other through communities of practice—groups of people who have a shared interest, passion, religious or spiritual need, life stage—who come together to learn with and from each other. William Synder describes communities of practice having three dimensions: “the domain (what it’s about); the topic (the issues that they are facing); and the community (the people who are involved).”

In a network approach, groups form naturally as individuals and families connect with others around shared interests, passions, needs, or life stage. Participation in these groups and their shared activities develop relationships, provide a supportive community, and promote learning and the application of that learning. By creating a network with a great variety of activities, congregations can intentionally promote the natural development of communities of learning and practice around these shared activities. This is a different approach from the congregations who adopt a small group model of church and then organize people into small groups.

Oftentimes this approach can feel artificial and contrived. In a network approach groups are self-organizing around activities that reflect their interests, passions, hungers, or needs.

Imagine a group forming around a Bible study offering on the faith formation network. They may do this in a small group, but they are engaged in a larger community of practice in their congregation or in the world focused on reading and studying the Bible. People in the small group connect, face-to-face and/or online, to study the Bible together and to learn how to apply the Bible in their daily lives. They can connect with other groups, via social media, to share their experience of learning and practice. They can share their learning with the whole congregation, providing an opportunity for everyone to grow in their understanding of the Bible.

Digital Platforms for Faith Formation

Faith formation incorporates digital platforms (websites) that integrate all of the content (programs, activities, resources), connects people to the content and to each other, provides continuity for people across different learning experiences, and is available anytime, anywhere.

We can already see (and have probably personally experienced) the power of digital platforms for learning. Universities across the country are making their courses available online for free. The Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org) is providing thousands of instructional videos for elementary and high school education for free so that students can learn on their own and teachers can “flip the classroom” by having students watch the videos (the content) as homework and transform the classroom into a laboratory for applying the content. TED.com is making available the videos of all their world-class presenters for free and TedEd (<http://ed.ted.com>) is becoming a platform for creating customized lessons around TED Talks.

Art museums, children’s museums, natural history museums, libraries, science centers, and more are building interactive, multimedia online digital platforms for their content that serves as a second place for learning to complement their physical place. As just one example, the Boston Science Center (www.mos.org), a marvelous hands-on environment for experiencing and learning science, has built a digital platform for an online experience of the science center with their YouTube channel for their videos, a Facebook page, Pinterest boards for exhibits, Flickr photostream and Instagram sites for photos, and more. The Boston Science Center is now accessible 24x7x365 to everyone and is networked via social media.

In the digital age, congregations need to develop online digital platforms as a second place for faith formation with unique features and content, which also extends and expands programs and activities in physical settings. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive providers of faith formation,

70 Reimagining Faith Formation

but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to people and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere.

A faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering the experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources of the network, and for engaging people in learning and faith formation. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online.

The technological and skill barriers for building a digital platform continue to decrease with the availability of drag and drop website builders like Weebly (www.Weebly.com), Wix (www.Wix.com), and Squarespace (www.squarespace.com). For more advanced website building there is WordPress (www.wordpress.com) with its thousands of templates and plug-ins.

Blended Faith Formation

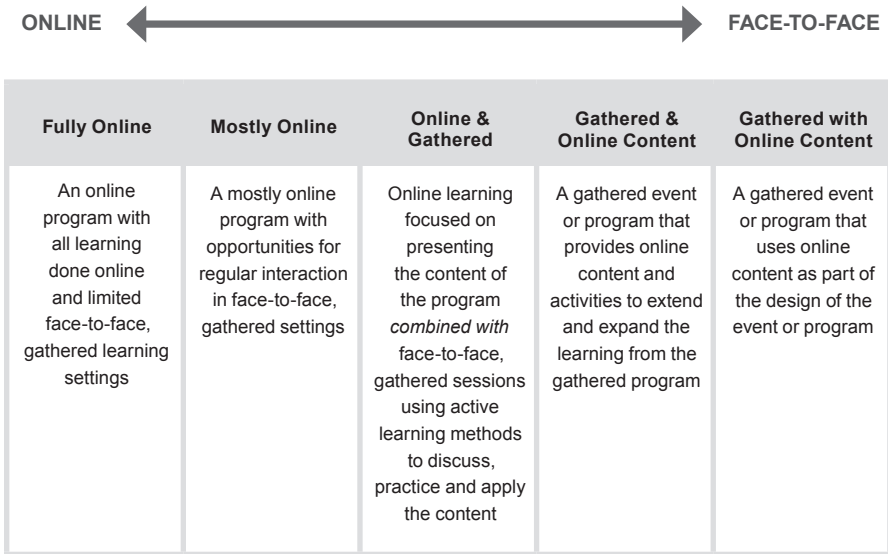
Faith formation integrates online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Michael Horn and Heather Staker describe blended learning as “a formal education program in which a person learns at least in part through online learning with some element of learner control over time, place, path, and/or pace; *and* at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. The modalities along each person’s learning path in a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated experience” (Staker and Horn, 54).

The team at “More than Blended Learning” (<http://morethanblended.com>) describes a blended solution as “a learning intervention that combines a number of contrasting methods and/or media.” In the methods category, we can blend by *social context*—alone, one-to-one, in a group, in a community and by *learning strategy*—exposition, instruction, guided discovery, exploration. In the media category, we can blend by *delivery channel*—face-to-face, offline media, online media, and by *communications mode*—synchronous (same-time) and asynchronous (own-time).

Faith formation programs, activities, and experiences can be offered in a variety of places, integrating physical and online settings. These settings can be seen as a continuum: ranging from fully online programming to gathered programming in physical settings that use online resources. Blended faith formation usually combines online delivery of religious content and experiences with the best features of gathered face-to-face programs.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum



Imagine the possibilities for utilizing the five blended strategies in designing new programming, redesigning existing programming, surrounding events and programs with online content, and selecting a variety of digital programs, activities, and resources that can be used alone (fully online) or used in conjunction with face-to-face programs.

Gathered with Online Content

We can design a gathered program using online content from websites, videos from YouTube or other video sites, and blogs and other social media. With an abundance of high-quality digital content, this first option is the easiest way to bring the digital world into a gathered program.

Gathered and Online Content

We can connect church programs or events with online content that extends and deepens the experience through learning, prayer, ritual, action, etc. Gathered events and programs, such as Sunday worship, church year feasts and seasons, inter-generational and family programs, classes, youth group meetings, mission trips, retreat experiences, and vacation Bible school would all benefit from extending the experience with digital content for learning, praying, celebrating, having faith conversations, acting/serving, and more. The eight faith-forming processes (see

72 Reimagining Faith Formation

page 38) can serve as an organizing template for developing and selecting activities. Here are some examples:

- Extend Sunday worship through the week using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings, sermon, and church year season; and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas, conversation activities, and more.
- Connect Vacation Bible School with families at home by providing activities online that deepen the content from each day of Vacation Bible School: study activities around the theme or Scripture story/message of the day, a prayer or devotion, a book to read, a video to watch, and more.
- Provide a forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life—delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website. Here’s an illustration:

CHURCH LIFE EVENTS

Ash Wednesday
Lent Sunday liturgies
Stations of the Cross
Lent prayer
Lent retreat
Lent service
Lent soup suppers

DAILY AND HOME LIFE ACTIVITIES

Fasting activities
Praying activities
Service/almsgiving activities
Lectionary reflections
Lent study resources and videos
Lent devotions
Daily Bible readings

Online and Gathered

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. Here are some examples:

- Redesign children’s faith formation so that children (and their parents) are learning the content at home with online content (and/or a textbook) and doing activities with their parents at home, and then refocus “class time” to engage children in creating projects and activities that demonstrate their learning.
- Design a high school confirmation program that provides the content usually taught in the weekly sessions into an online platform for individual learning—watching videos, reading short materials, and writing a reflection

journal; engage the young people in small groups during the month to discuss their online learning; and then meet 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.

- Develop an online center for justice and service where people of all ages can find a justice issue that they are passionate about, learn more about the issue, and explore biblical and Christian teaching on justice. Congregations can provide a variety of ways for people to act on their justice issue—as individuals, families, or groups, through local and global projects. People can share their experiences with the whole congregation using social media.

Mostly Online

We can offer opportunities for individuals, families, and small groups to utilize the digital platform as their primary learning setting and provide opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings or in a web conference format, such as a Google+ Hangout. Here are some examples:

- Offer one-hour parent webinar programs delivered to parents at home in a four-month timeframe: three monthly webinars followed by a parent gathering at church in month four.
- Offer online learning plans and resources for self-study or small group study with video recordings of adult faith formation presentations at church. Invite people to gather at the conclusion of their learning to share their insights with others who participated.
- Develop an online Bible study where groups can meet regularly in a physical setting or virtually through Skype or a Google+ Hangout for sharing their learning.
- Offer selected online courses and activities from colleges, seminaries, and religious organization through the faith formation website for individualized learning with the option for a mentor or small group gathering.

Fully Online

The rise of high-quality and easily accessible online religious content—courses, activities, print and e-books, audio and video programs, and content-rich websites—has made designing online faith formation feasible. Here are some examples:

- Offer adults a variety of online Bible and theology courses for individual study using online courses from colleges and seminaries, video programs on YouTube, online programs and webinars from religious publishers and organizations.

74 Reimagining Faith Formation

- Provide 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.
- Provide an online parent resource center with the best knowledge, practices, and tools for parenting in print, audio, and video; include links to quality parent websites and family faith formation websites and set up a parent blog and/or Facebook page where parents can post their experiences, questions, and insights.
- Provide an online retreat experience available through a publisher or a religious organization.

FAITH FORMATION NETWORKS IN PRACTICE

At this point you are probably wondering, what would a faith formation network for an age group or generation or family look like in practice? Let's review the key design features of a network and then explore how to put them in practice in fashioning a faith formation network.

1. Faith formation is developed around the eight faith-forming processes—caring relationships, celebrating liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life, praying and spiritual formation, reading the Bible, serving people in need and working for justice and caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community. These eight processes provide both a *framework* for a comprehensive curriculum with age groups, generations, and families and the *content*—knowledge and practices—of the Christian faith.
2. Intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences are at the *center* of all faith formation networks, engaging all ages and generations in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in intergenerational faith experiences.
3. Age-group and generational faith formation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of life.
4. Family faith formation nurtures family faith, develops the faith life of parents and grandparents, strengthens family life, and builds the parenting knowledge and skills of parents.
5. Missional faith formation expands and extends the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live; and provides pathways for people to consider or reconsider

the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community.

6. Faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces, and conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.
7. Faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning.
8. Faith formation provides the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving people an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. People are guided by trusted mentors/guides who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs.
9. Faith formation recognizes that learning is a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual. Faith formation networks recognize that the motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning.
10. Faith formation incorporates digital platforms (websites) that integrate all of the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provides continuity for people across different learning experiences, and is available anytime, anywhere, anyplace, 24x7x365.
11. Faith formation integrates online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Designing a Network

Imagine designing an Adult Faith Formation Network for adults in their 50s through the early 70s with content that provides developmentally- and generationally-appropriate faith knowledge and practices; engages adults intergenerationally in the life and events of the Christian community; and provides adult programs and activities in a variety of settings and media formats, organized around the eight faith-forming processes and three adult-specific content areas: adult life issues, discovering faith (outreach to the “churchless”), and grandparents.

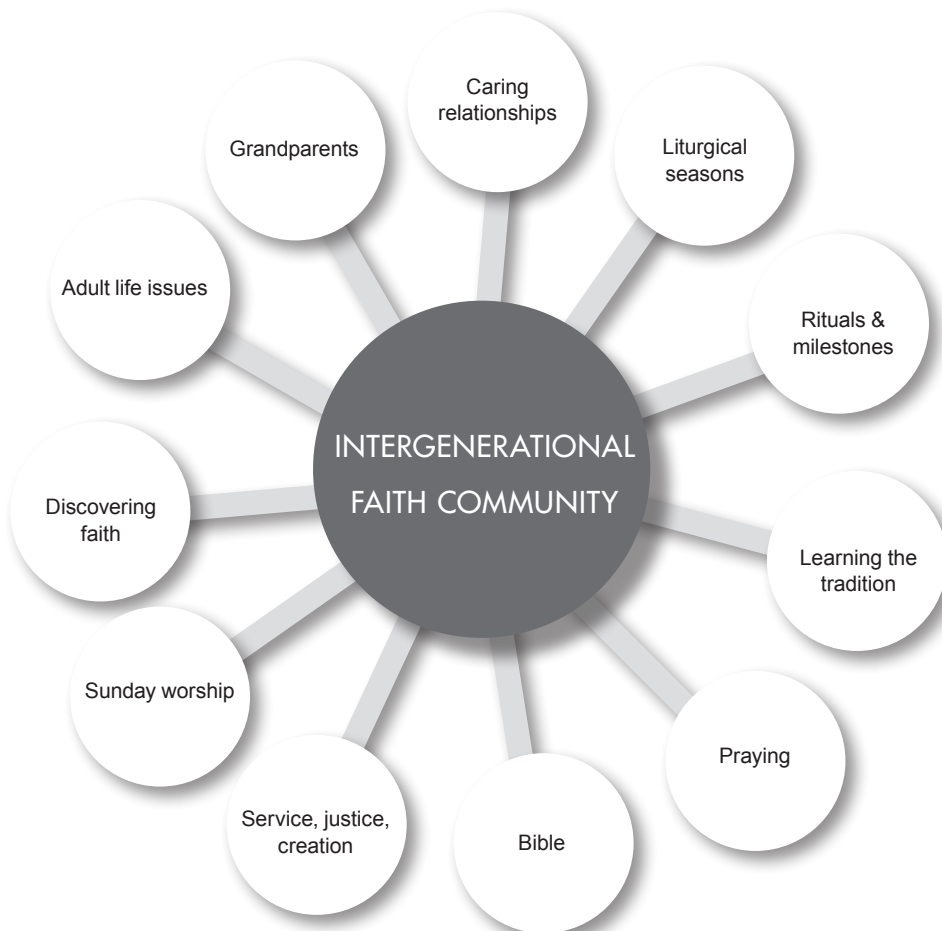
At the center of the Adult Faith Formation Network is the intergenerational faith community with its events—Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, ritual celebrations, acts of justice and service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and the events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation—and the connections and relationships across generations. It may also

76 Reimagining Faith Formation

have intentional intergenerational programming such as intergenerational learning and service projects. We want to utilize the events of church throughout the Adult Faith Formation Network and encourage adult participation in the life of the faith community and the opportunities for intergenerational connection and relationship.

Programming can be designed and offered in three, four-month seasons: January–April, May–August, and September–December. Here is an example of one season (January–April) that provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, and resources in physical places and online spaces, and is conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world. (For an illustration of an adult faith formation network and website go to: <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>.) As you read this example of adult faith formation, imagine developing similar networks for every age group in your congregation and for the whole family.

Adult Faith Formation Network



Caring Relationships

- Friday Lent simple meals
- Social gatherings for adults
- Intergenerational experiences and programs in the church community
- Career mentoring program between adults and young adults entering the workplace, addressing work issues, money management, career planning, living as a Christian in the workplace and world, and more

Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

- A forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life—delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website, including fasting activities, praying activities, service/almsgiving activities, lectionary reflections, Lent study resources and videos, Lent devotions, and daily Bible readings

Celebrating Rituals and Milestones

- Resources for celebrating adult milestones and life transitions, such as retirement, becoming a grandparent, at home with family and friends

Learning the Christian Tradition and Applying It to Life

- A theology book-of-the-month program with groups meeting at church, at home, in community settings, and online via web conferencing; and online content with discussion questions and links for further learning
- January theology enrichment series: four presentations at church by guest experts on a theological theme; video recording of each presentation for online viewing and small group learning; and online resources for continuing learning
- Online theology courses selected for individual study using offerings at colleges/seminaries and on iTunes University
- An online theology video library of presentations on theological topics for individual or small group study

Praying and Spiritual Formation

- Lent spiritual practices course: a five-session spiritual practices course with sessions on prayer styles and traditions, fixed-hour prayer, contemplation and meditation, spiritual reading and praying with art and music, and Sabbath
- An online Lent retreat experience delivered daily via email

78 Reimagining Faith Formation

- Online prayer center with links to print, audio, video, and digital resources for daily prayer, devotions, liturgy of the hours, and more

Reading the Bible

- A six-week Lent Bible study program organized in variety of settings with a print resource and online support materials and videos
- Links to online resources for Bible study and a list of Bible apps for individual use

Serving People in Need, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation

- A variety of service/mission projects—just for adults or intergenerational—already offered by justice and service organizations, that provide a range of options for service, e.g., local one-day projects, short-term mission trips of two to five days, weeklong mission trips, and global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days
- An online justice and service center where people can learn about justice issues and the biblical and church teachings on justice, service, and care for creation

Worshipping God within the Faith Community

- Online resources for extending Sunday worship into daily life and family life using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings and sermon, and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas, conversation activities, and more
- “Coffee and Conversation” groups after Sunday worship to reflect on the Sunday readings using *Lectio Divina*

Adult Life Issues

- Programs and small groups organized around adult life tasks and issues, such as children getting married, retirement, finances in later life, caring for an aging parent, dealing with illness
- Links to online programs and resources that address adult life tasks and issues, such www.AARP.org
- Connection to programs sponsored by churches or community organizations on adult life issues

Just for Grandparents

- Grandparent-grandchild programs, such as a mini-retreat program, trips, service projects, and more, organized by the church
- Articles and materials to help grandparents understand their role in faith formation and raising their grandchildren
- Faith-forming activities that grandparents can use with their grandchildren
- A list of recommended children's Bibles, storybooks, and video programs that grandparents can use with grandchildren

Discovering Faith

- Sponsor a program, such as Alpha, for “churchless” adults who want to explore the Christian faith again or for the first time
- Develop a weekly program, such as Lifetree Café, in a community setting for adults who want to connect with a community, discuss spiritual matters, and explore faith
- Offer “reentry” experiences and mentors/guides for those who want to join the church community and need a gradual reintroduction to church life and the Christian faith

CONCLUSION

Chapters 2 and 3 have developed the vision for twenty-first century faith formation—a new ecosystem and a network model of faith formation. We now turn toward bringing the vision to life. The next two chapters provide knowledge and skills for designing and implementing a faith formation network. Chapter 4 guides you through a process for designing a faith formation curriculum. Chapter 5 introduces the role of the faith formation curator and the work of curating resources—finding the best resources in all media formats that match with people's learning needs.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Keith. “Introducing the Digital Cathedral.” (<http://pastorkeithanderson.net/item/introducing-the-digital-cathedral#sthash.ViPY5XCd.dpuf>)
- Anderson, Keith. “The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World.” Posted Feb 04, 2014, New Media Project (<http://www.cpx.cts.edu/newmedia/blog/new-media-project/2014/02/04/the-digital-cathedral-networked-ministry-in-a-wireless-world#sthash.vj3g6xDW.dpuf>)
- Anderson, Keith. *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*. New York: Morehouse, 2015.

80 Reimagining Faith Formation

- Fuller, Buckminster. "Quotes." (http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/165737.Buckminster_Fuller)
- Horn, Michael B. and Heather Staker. *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014.
- Ito, Mizuko, Kris Gutierrez, Sonia Livingstone, Bill Penuel, Jean Rhodes, Katie Salie, Juliet Schor, Julian Sefton-Green, and S. Craig Watkins. "Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design." Digital Media and Learning Research Network, 2013. (<http://clrn.dmlhub.net>)
- Pink, Daniel. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York: Riverhead, 2009.
- Price, Katherine. "Glimpses of the Future of Education." *Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem*. Center for the Future of Museums, 2014. (<http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/center-for-the-future-of-museums/building-the-future-of-education-museums-and-the-learning-ecosystem.pdf?sfvrsn=2>)
- "Re-imagining Learning in the 21st Century." MacArthur Foundation: Digital Media and Learning Network, 2010.
- Snyder, William. "Cultivating Communities." *Faith and Leadership*. July 27, 2008. (<http://www.faithandleadership.com/multimedia/william-snyder-cultivating-communities>)
- Watson, John. "Blending Learning: The Convergence of Online and Face-to-Face Education." National American Council for Online Learning, 2008 (www.inacol.org)
- "What Is Blended Learning?" More than Blend Learning. (<http://morethanblended.com>)

APPENDIX

Connected Learning Principles

(<http://clrn.dmlhub.net/publication/connected-learning-an-agenda-for-research-and-design>)

In 2013, the Digital Media and Learning Research Network, supported by the MacArthur Foundation, issued a major report, “Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design” that provides a foundation for developing new models of learning for the digital age that are powerful, relevant, and engaging. They describe the concept of *connected learning* as an educational approach designed for our ever-changing world, and to the realities of the digital age where the demand for learning never stops. Connected learning is anchored in research, robust theories of learning, and the best of traditional standards, but also designed to mine the learning potential of the new social media and digital media domains. It harnesses the advances and innovations of our connected age to serve learning.

Connected learning knits together three crucial contexts for learning:

1. **Peer Supported.** In their everyday exchanges with peers and friends, young people are contributing, sharing, and giving feedback in inclusive social experiences that are fluid and highly engaging.
2. **Interest-Powered.** When a subject is personally interesting and relevant, learners achieve much higher-order learning outcomes.
3. **Academically-Oriented.** Learners flourish and realize their potential when they can connect their interests and social engagement to academic studies, civic engagement, and career opportunity.

Core properties of connected learning experiences include:

1. **Production-Centered.** Digital tools provide opportunities for producing and creating a wide variety of media, knowledge, and cultural content in experimental and active ways.
2. **Shared Purpose.** Social media and web-based communities provide unprecedented opportunities for cross-generational and cross-cultural learning and connection to unfold and thrive around common goals and interests.

82 Reimagining Faith Formation

3. **Openly Networked.** Online platforms and digital tools can make learning resources abundant, accessible, and visible across all learner settings.

Design principles inform the intentional connecting of learning environments:

1. **Everyone can participate.** Experiences invite participation and provide many different ways for individuals and groups to contribute.
2. **Learning happens by doing.** Learning is experiential and part of the pursuit of meaningful activities and projects.
3. **Challenge is constant.** Interest or cultivation of an interest creates both a “need to know” and a “need to share.”
4. **Everything is connected.** Young people are provided with multiple learning contexts for engaging in connected learning—contexts in which they receive immediate feedback on progress, have access to tools for planning and reflection, and are given opportunities for mastery.

New media amplifies opportunities for connected learning:

1. **Fostering engagement and self-expression.** Interactive, immersive, and personalized technologies can provide responsive feedback, support a diversity of learning styles and literacy, and pace learning according to individual needs.
2. **Increasing accessibility to knowledge and learning experiences.** Through online search, educational resources, and communities of expertise and interest, young people can easily access information and find relationships that support self-directed and interest-driven learning.
3. **Expanding social supports for interests.** Through social media, young people can form relationships with peers and caring adults that are centered on interests, expertise, and future opportunity in areas of interest.
4. **Expanding diversity and building capacity.** New media networks empower marginalized and non-institutionalized groups and cultures to have a voice, mobilize, organize, and build capacity.