CHAPTER 5

REIMAGINING THE RESOURCES

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

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

Today, the concept of curation and curators has spread beyond the world of museums and libraries to all forms of digital content. In *Curation Nation*, Steven Rosenbaum writes,

> In the past we lived in a world of disciplines. The senior editorial leadership at magazines were known as editors. The folks who chose which TV shows played on a TV network were programmers. The people who picked which things would be on the shelves of your local stores were retailers. Each of these professions involved choosing the right things, putting them in the proper order, and creating a collection that was appealing to an audience or consumer. Oh, and there was that rarified individual who selected objects of art to present in a museum or gallery: they were called curators.

Today, curation is the coin of the realm. Film Festivals curate their pro-
gram. Web sites curate their editorial. The team at the shopping site Gilt
Group curates the items it offer for sale. *Curation* was once a word that
seemed to mean highbrow, expensive, out of reach of mere mortals. But
today museum curators must compete with media curation at Newser,
collections of handmade crafts at Etsy, or the curated collection of the best
roll-on luggage at Squidoo. Certainly curation means quality, but now
quality is in the eye of the beholder (Rosenbaum, 3).

We live surrounded by an abundance of digital content. We are shifting from
an era of content scarcity to one of content abundance. Daniel J. Levitan writes,
"Google estimates that there are 300 exabytes (300 followed by 18 zeros) of
human-made information in the world today. Only four years ago there were just
30 exabytes. We've created more information in the past few years than in all of
human history before us." Here are just a few examples of the explosion of digital
content (as of January 2015):

- There are between 175–200 million blogs and growing.
- There are over 700 million websites and growing.
- Over 23 million students from around the world have used the thousands
  of lessons and videos on The Khan Academy (https://www.khanacademy.
  org), for free.
- There are over 1900 Ted Talks (www.ted.com) available for free.
- There are over 400 interactive online classes and MOOCs from the world's
  best universities on EdX (MIT, Harvard, Berkeley, and more), and they
  are free.
- Over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. (There
  are 1 billion YouTube users.)
- There have been over 20 billion photos shared on Instagram.
- And one last, mind-expanding statistic: Google estimates that there are 60
  trillion web pages and growing (yes, that is trillion).

It's easy to see why so many people are overwhelmed with the explosion of digi-
tal content and its availability anytime and anywhere via mobile devices—laptops,
tablets, phones, and now watches. Never has it been more important for people—
curators—to sort through this vast amount of content and present it in a way that is
meaningful and organized for us. This is the role of content curation. Beth Kanter
describes content curation in this way,

Content curation is the process of sorting through the vast amounts of
content on the web and presenting it in a meaningful and organized way
around a specific theme. The work involves sifting, sorting, arranging,

and publishing information. A content curator cherry picks the best content that is important and relevant to share with their community. It isn't unlike what a museum curator does to produce an exhibition: They identify the theme, they provide the context, they decide which paintings to hang on the wall, how they should be annotated, and how they should be displayed for the public.

Content curation is not about collecting links or being an information pack rat, it is more about putting them into a context with organization, annotation, and presentation. Content curators provide a customized, vetted selection of the best and most relevant resources on a very specific topic or theme. . . . A content curator continually seeks, makes sense of, and shares the best and most relevant content on a particular topic online (Beth's Blog, October 4, 2011).

A content curator is someone who continually finds, groups, organizes, and shares the best and most relevant content on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. Content curators provide a personalized, high-quality selection of the best and most relevant content and resources available. They do not create more content, but make sense of all the content that others are creating. Curation is an evolving idea that addresses two parallel trends: the explosive growth in information and our need to be able to find information in coherent, reasonably contextual groupings.

One of the best ways to understand content curation is to see it in practice. Visit the following websites to see how they organize, describe, and present their content:

- NPR Music (www.npr.org/music)
- Curated Children's Books (www.curatedchildrensbooks.com)
- Edutopia (www.edutopia.org)
- The Food Network (www.foodnetwork.com)
- HGTV (www.hgtv.com)
- Faith and Leadership (www.faithandleadership.com)
- Congregational Resource Guide (http://thecrg.org)

CURATION AND FAITH FORMATION

How does curation apply to faith formation? When a faith formation curriculum was a matter of selecting the right print resource from the right religious publisher, there was little need for curation. Leaders simply selected the right resource. But even in the era of "the resource is the curriculum," many faith formation leaders

were curators. To design home-grown programming they would search through print resources—and perhaps films or music—to design a retreat or a youth meeting or an adult topical series or a parent workshop. They never thought of themselves as curators, but that is what they were doing—searching through a variety of resources, selecting the most appropriate resources to match with the needs of the people and the program, and then using the resource in the program design.

We are moving to a new model of faith formation where the resource is not the curriculum. Just the opposite: the curriculum has many resources—in all types of media formats. In this new model we move from *need* to *content area* to *programming* to *resource*. Resources are essential, but they are the last step in the design process. And we will need a wide variety of resources to bring to life a curriculum that is now seen as *a lifelong journey of discipleship*—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today's world.

Fortunately, we now live in a era where there is an abundance of religious content in digital form—audio, video, apps, e-books, websites—and in print form. We are benefiting from the rise of online resource centers with freely accessible, high-quality religious content and experiences that congregations, families, and individuals can access. For example, *Workingpreacher.org* from Luther Seminary has hosted 2.5 million visits from preachers in more than two hundred countries over the past twelve months (as of January 2015). The *YouVersion Bible* app—with hundreds of versions (translations) of the Bible in over a hundred languages—has been installed over 170 million times on phones and tablets. Its app for children (Bible App for Kids) has been downloaded five million times in the fourteen months since its launch in November 2013. *VibrantFaithatHome.org* has over six hundred faith-forming activities for families with children, adolescents, young adults, and adults—all available for free. And these examples can be multiplied hundreds of times.

In the new digital world of abundant resources, the role of the faith formation leader is shifting from *providing* religious content and programming to *curating* religious content and experiences for all ages. The convergence of an abundance of content, the variety of programming on a faith formation network to address the diverse needs and interests of people today, and the online platform for delivering programming and connecting people is creating the impetus for faith formation leaders to reimagine their primary role.

The abundance of available resources means that there is a need for trusted guidance in finding and selecting quality religious content and experiences. People are looking for trusted guides to select quality faith formation experiences and curate learning paths and resources to explore and learn more deeply on a specific topic. In a faith formation network people rely on curators to select the very best content to engage them in experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith.
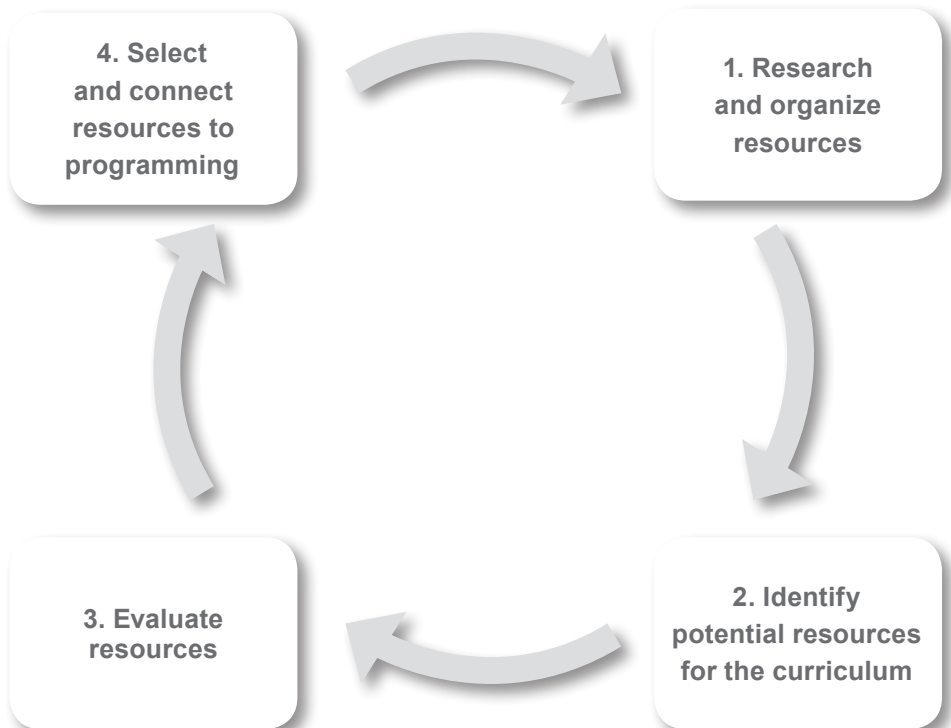
So what is a faith formation curator? **A faith formation curator is a trusted guide who continually finds, groups, organizes, and connects the best**

and most relevant content and resources on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. The subjects can be one of the eight faith-forming processes, a life stage issue, a family faith practice, parenting knowledge and skills, missional programming, and more. The resources can come in many forms: people resources, programs at church and in the community, and media resources (print, audio, video, online, digital). Curation is the way that faith formation leaders connect programming with high-quality resources.

CURATING RELIGIOUS CONTENT

We can identify four primary roles in the process of curating faith formation: 1) research and organize resources, 2) identify potential resources for the curriculum, 3) evaluate resources, and 4) connect the resources to network programming. The research and organize phase of the process is continuous. Good curators are always searching for new resources and organizing them for future use.

The Process of Curating

4. Select and connect resources to programming

1. Research and organize resources

2. Identify potential resources for the curriculum

3. Evaluate resources

Preparation: Build a Curation Support System

A curator relies on a support system of people, online resources, and communication to locate resources for the faith formation curriculum, and to stay up-to-date on new resources. Here are several important elements in building a curation support system and getting organized for the work of faith formation curation.

Develop trusted expert curators to assist. These people can be asked (call, text, or email) for assistance in curating resources for a particular audience or topic. We all know people in faith formation who make it part of their work to stay current with the best resources. Make a list of these people and invite them to be part of the curation support system. People who have curation in their DNA are happy to assist by recommending the best resources.

Develop a list of high–quality online resource centers. These centers should have trusted, high-quality content. Be selective—this does not have to be a long list of websites. Select resource centers with well-produced content. Review websites from national and regional denominational agencies, religious publishers, religious organizations with faith formation content, and non–profit organizations with online content for children, youth, young adults, adults, and families. There are hundreds of online resource centers with free content that can be used in matching resources to programming. Here are several websites (as of January 2015) that illustrate high-quality content that can serve as a guide for building a list of online resource centers. For more websites go to: www.CuratingFaithFormation.com.

- Bible: Enter the Bible (www.enterthebible.org)
- Church Year Resources: Loyola Press (www.loyolapress.com/liturgical-year.htm)
- Congregation: Congregational Resource Guide (http://thecrg.org)
- Family and parents: ParentFurther (www.parentfurther.com)
- Family: Catholic Family Faith (www.catholicfamilyfaith.org)
- Faith formation activities: Vibrant Faith at Home (http://vibrantfaithathome.org)
- Faith formation activities: St. Mary's Press Resource Center (www.smp.org/resourcecenter)
- Faith formation activities: Lesson Plans that Work (http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/lessons)
- Faith formation activities: Faith Gateway (www.faithgateway.com)
- Spirituality: Explore Faith (www.explorefaith.org)
- Spirituality: Spirituality and Practice (www.spiritualityandpractice.com)
- Worship: The Text This Week (http://www.textweek.com)
- Worship: Working Preacher (www.workingpreacher.org)

For online video resource centers go to:

- Chuck Knows Church (www.chuckknowschurch.com)
- G_dcast (www.g-dcast.com)
- Outside da Box (https://outsidedabox.com)
- The Skit Guys (http://skitguys.com)
- VCat (Video Catechism) (www.vcat.org)
- The Work of the People (www.theworkofthepeople.com)
- WorshipHouse Media (www.worshiphousemedia.com)

Subscribe to faith formation blogs and newsletters. These resources review faith formation resources to make it easier to keep up-to-date on what's new. Blogs and newsletters are produced by individuals, denominational offices, seminaries, religious organizations, and religious publishers. Here are several blogs and news-letters that illustrate faith formation curation (as of January 2015):

- Build Faith (www.buildfaith.org)
- Children's Ministry (http://childrensministry.com)
- CRC Network—Christian Reformed Church (http://network.crcna.org)
- Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (http://worship.calvin.edu)
- eCatechist (www.ecatechist.com)
- Faith & Leadership—Duke Divinity (http://faithandleadership.com)
- Key Resources—Virginia Theological Seminary (www.keyhallonline.org)

Receiving blogs and newsletters can be overwhelming, so organize them by using an RSS reader (Really Simple Syndication) that categorizes blog posts and newsletters in a separate application to make viewing easy. Here are three of the highest rated applications (as of January 2015):

- *ReadKit* for Mac & iOS (http://readkitapp.com). This is a Mac RSS reader that can organize blogs and newsletter subscriptions that can be read online or offline. Just subscribe to a blog or newsletter using the RSS reader option. It also supports other RSS and curating applications: Instapaper, Pocket, Readability, Pinboard, Delicious articles, Feedly, Fever, NewsBlur, Feedbin, and Feed Wrangler.
- *G2Reade*r for PC & Android (www.g2reader.com). This is a web-based RSS feed reader that requires little more than an email and password signup. G2Reader is a tool for gathering and reading blogs and websites. Just subscribe to a blog or newsletter using the RSS reader option.
- *Feedly* for Mac, iOS, PC, and Android (https://feedly.com). Feedly is a way to organize, read, and share the content of websites all in one place. Organize blogs, news sites, podcasts and YouTube channels and access them all in one place.

Curating is a twelve-month process. Faith formation curators are always looking for resources that address the needs of their target audiences and their faith formation curricula. Use the tools previously described and the three steps that follow to stay informed on the latest resources as they become available. Be sure to join mailing lists (email or RSS feeds) for selected publishers, organizations, websites, and schools in order to receive regular updates on new resources.

Step 1. Research and Organize the Resources

The first step in the curation process is researching and reviewing resources. This is the collection phase. There's no need to select or evaluate resources at this stage—the key is to collect as many high-quality resources for faith formation in all areas and age groups. Selecting potential resources for a particular curriculum and evaluating resources comes later. Every congregation needs a "library" of resources to draw upon for programming a faith formation curriculum and network. Step 1 is a continuous process—faith formation curators are always researching and organizing resources so that they are ready to match resources with programming for a new season.

Finding Resources

Finding the right resources can sound like a daunting task, given the abundance of resources available. Here are five categories of resources to explore:

- *People resources.* Research the people resources in the church, community, church agencies, colleges and seminaries, church-related organizations, and more that can be utilized in conducting programming. Develop a list of people resources and the knowledge and skills they offer.
- *Community resources.* Research the programs and activities in the community: other churches, community agencies, religious organizations, retreat and spiritual life centers, religious camps, colleges and universities, and more. Develop a list of these organizations and the types of resources they provide. Be sure to check on their website for digital programs and activities, such as webinars and video programs.
- *Religious publisher resources.* Research the print and video resources that publishers produce and the free digital resources on their websites.
- *Online resources.* Research online resource centers that provide print content in digital form, art, music, e-books, audio podcasts, videos, webinars, small group studies, online courses, and much more. Research the variety of online faith formation content offered by colleges, universities, seminaries, and religious organizations.
- *Digital resources.* Research the increasing number of Bible apps and religious apps in the App Store (Mac and iOS) and in Google Play (Android). Also

check the religion section in Best Apps for Kids (http://bestappsforkids.com) and all of the children and family recommendations at Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org).

Research Checklist

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

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

Organizing Resources

The lifelong faith formation curriculum plan template provides one organizational schema for sorting resources (see the chart in Chapter 4 on page 93). For resources that can be stored on a computer, organization can be as simple as setting up folders for each age group with ten subfolders for programming (eight faith-forming processes, missional, and life stage).

For digital content a bookmarking application is essential. Bundlr (http://bundlr.com) has the ability to create bundles with any kind of online content: articles, photos, videos, tweets, quotes, and links. By using Bundlr's "Bundle This!" button in the web browser people can clip content while browsing the Internet. Each bundle has its own public webpage so that it can be shared freely (through its link or on social networks) or even embedded on any website. For an example of a curation website that uses Bundlr to create the links go to: www.CuratingFaithFormation.com.

Developing Homegrown Resources

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

Step 2. Identify Potential Resources

Using the seasonal plan for your target audience, identify potential resources to use in implementing the programming. Take each content area and identity resources that could be used in each program in the content area. No need to select the ones you are going to use at this point. Just catalog them. Once this is done, the resources can be evaluated for inclusion in the curriculum and then published to the website.

Content Area	Program 1	Resources
	Program 2	Resources

On the next page is a simple example of matching programming ideas with resources for Lent during the January–April season. The template provides a structure for organizing the resources. Many more potential resources could be added to the ones already included.

Content Area	Program	Resources
Lent	Learning about Lent	• Video: *Ash Wednesday in 2 Minutes*—Busted Halo • Video: *Ash Wednesday*—Chuck Knows Church • Activity: "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me: Lent"—Vibrant Faith at Home • Article: "The Three Lent Traditions: Praying, Fasting, Almsgiving" • A 40-Day Lenten Calendar • Daily Bible readings for Lent—links to a variety of online resources
	Praying	• Lent Devotions—Luther Seminary • Prayers for each of Lent—links to a variety of online resources • Table prayers for each week of Lent—links to a variety of online resources • Stations of the Cross—Fridays at church
	Almsgiving Serving	• Church-wide service day during Lent for all ages • Study and action projects: a list of justice issues and action projects that individuals and families can adopt during Lent—links to justice organizations to learning about issues and find action projects • Collection of food and clothing for the local shelter and food bank • Bible readings on justice and service during
	Fasting	• Simple meal cookbook for Lent—a variety of menus from online sources available on the faith formation website • Friday simple meals at the church

Step 3. Evaluate Resources

All faith formation curators need standards for evaluating faith formation resources that reflect their Christian tradition and the needs of their congregation. A set of evaluation standards needs to be developed locally. Consult denominational resources for evaluating curriculum resources. Most denominations have evaluation standards for assessing educational resources or textbooks. This can serve as a basis for developing the congregation's evaluation standards. Consult Sharon Ely Pearson's criteria for curriculum resources in "Curriculum and the Ministry of Christian Education" (https://www.churchpublishing.org/media/custom/IN-Formation/EvaluatingCurriculum.pdf).

Here are ten potential categories for developing a resource evaluation checklist. Add one or more focusing questions to each category. Try to keep the checklist short so that it is easy to use. Use the evaluation criteria to review the potential resources identified in Step 2 and develop a list of resources that meet the criteria.

1. Biblical content and interpretation

2. theological content and emphasis

3. developmental appropriateness

4. ethnic-cultural appropriateness

5. inclusive of diversity

6. respect for diverse ways of learning

7. appearance and visual appeal

8. ease-of-use

9. quality of experience

10. ability to be incorporated into daily and home life

Step 4. Select the Resources and Connect to Programming

Select the best resources for the faith formation curriculum and connect them to the programming. Publish the programming to the website. Sometimes this involves a description of a program with dates and times and locations; other times it will be actual content on the website for people to experience (watch a video, read an article); and other times it will be a link to the content on another website. In each case it is important to describe the relationship between the content published on the website and the learning needs of people so they can see the connection to their spiritual or religious needs, interests, concerns, or life issues.

When publishing an activity online, be sure that permission is granted for its use. If explicit permission is not given, just write to the source to request permission. For content like YouTube videos, permission is already given to play a video on the website. The same is true when linking to a resource on another website. There is no copyright issue when there is a link to the content on someone else's website. Be sure to give proper attribution to all resources: who produced it, where it was published, a website address where it can be found, etc.

The best way to see how to connect resources to programming is by viewing websites. Review two sites that I created: http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com and http://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com, as well as links to congregational faith formation websites at www.21stCenturyFaithFormation.com in the Case Studies section.

Continue to Research and Organize the Resources

Faith formation curators are always researching and organizing resources so that they are ready to match resources with programming for a new season. Continue to add resources to the congregational library throughout the year so there's fresh content for the faith formation curriculum.

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