# Developing Adult Faith Formation Programming

## JOHN ROBERTO

The *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* advocates for a vision and practices that lead to the development of a comprehensive, adult faith formation plan for the congregation that:

- Focuses on the process of growing in faith and discipleship using the eight faith-forming processes as a framework for designing adult faith formation.
- Provides developmentally- and generationally-appropriate knowledge and practices for each season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.
- Engages adults intergenerationally in the life and events of the Christian community.
- is developed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources with a wide variety of engaging and interactive programs and experiences in physical places (church, home, community, world) and online spaces (website and social media platforms).

This chapter presents ten guides for developing adult faith formation programming that reflect current research and practice in adult learning and the key features of twenty-first century faith formation presented in chapter 1. These ten guides serve as a foundation for designing adult faith formation programs, activities, and resources in physical and online spaces:

1.  Focus on the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood.

2.  Target the spiritual and religious diversity of adults.

3.  Offer a wide variety of programming to address the diversity of adults' lives.

4.  Use multiple environments for programming.

5.  Enhance participation in programming by building on adult motivation and principles for effective adult learning.

6.  Design online and digitally enabled strategies into all programming.

7.  Develop programming around the essential eight faith-forming processes.

8.  Incorporate intergenerational programming into adult faith formation.

9.  Address the needs of families in each season of adulthood.

10. Design missional initiatives to reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.

Chapter 9 presents a planning process for designing adult faith formation for one or more seasons of adulthood. Find additional information and resources online for developing adult faith formation (case studies, articles, strategies, links to online resources, and more) at www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

# Guide 1

**Focus on the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood.**

One of the key features of twenty-first century adult faith formation is addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys at each stage of adulthood: young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+). Programs, activities, and resources need to be *targeted* and *tailored* to the lives of adults. Adult faith formation is person-centered, not content- or program-centered. The content, experiences, programs, methods, and delivery systems are designed around the lives of the adults. While

this may sound self-evident, it is not. So much of adult faith formation is developed from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determine the content and programming and deliver it to adults. In the twentieth-first century, the diversity of adulthood makes this approach ineffective.

Drawn from the research and perspectives in chapters 3–6, here are key characteristics and needs of each adult stage that can serve as a foundation for developing targeted and tailored approaches, programs, and strategies for faith formation. These will be especially helpful in designing adult faith formation using the process in chapter 9.

## Key Characteristics of Young Adults

1.  Young adults are exploring their identity: trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work, developing an individual sense of autonomy, and stabilizing a self-concept and body image.

2.  Young adults are "tinkering"—putting together a life from the skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand.

3.  Young adults are developing and maintaining intimate relationships with trust, love, and caring.

4.  Young adults are transitioning from their family of origin toward establishing independence in living arrangement, finances, career, and other aspects of their lives.

5.  Young adults are differentiating self without repudiating or replacing their family of origin—sorting out emotionally what they take from their family of origin, what they leave behind, and what they will create for themselves.

6.  Young adults are developing a career and occupational identity and working to establish a work-life balance.

7.  Young adults are adjusting to the expectations and responsibilities of the "adult" world.

8.  Young adults—many but not all—are committing to a marital partner, defining and learning the roles of married life.

9.  Young adults—many but not all—are having children and becoming parents, establishing a new family with its own rules, roles, responsibilities, values, and traditions, and developing parenting roles and skills.

10. Young adults are engaged in a theological reevaluation and reinvention—regardless of their affiliation or involvement with actual religious institutions—synthesizing tacit beliefs (synthetic-conventional faith) and revising implicit beliefs in light of stepping out of their social system of origin (individuative-reflective faith).

# Key Characteristics of Midlife Adults

1.  Midlife adults are continuing to seek a definition for self that is now focused on "Who am I with you?" Relationships take on deeper meaning and compel them to explore how the self is adjusted in the context of committed family, work, and civic relationships that have become so important at this stage of life. They are parents, colleagues, leaders, team members, and more.

2.  Midlife adults are anchoring themselves in a particular way of life filled with stable commitments and relationships.

3.  Midlife adults are focused on maintaining intimate relationships with other midlife adults while developing the capacity for new kinds of relationships with those younger and older than themselves. The midlife adult is involved in the generative task of caring and guiding the next generations (including children and grandchildren) and with caring for the older generation.

4.  Midlife adults are building extensive personal networks for themselves and their families—traditional networks around their families, coworkers, churches, and other organizations, supplemented by digital social networks that allow more frequent conversations. Midlife adults are striving for a healthy balance in their personal and social networks.

5.  Midlife adults are evaluating their lives at its midpoint and often growing beyond the pressures of the present moment toward an appreciation of the deeper meanings symbolized in religious tradition. Time for refreshment and reflection supports the active expression of generativity and care. Midlife adults are reflecting on "What are we spending and being spent for? What commands and receives our best time and energy? What causes, dreams, goals, or institutions are pouring out our life for? To what or whom are we committed in life and in death? What are our most sacred hopes, our most compelling goals, and purposes in life?"

6.  Midlife adults are engaged in family life and parenting children, adolescents, and, often, young adults. They are allowing for the increasing independence of adolescents while maintaining enough structure to foster continued family development. They are adjusting patterns of family communication, traditions, and celebrations for adolescent and young adult children. Many are adapting to an empty-nest household and redefining the marriage relationship and roles now that children are no longer at home full-time.

7.  Midlife adults are seeking a religion that emphasizes personal identity, religious experience, and a quest for religious identity in community. They want a religion emphasizing the sensual and experiential, combining the sacred and the profane, and incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs. They insist on an authentic religious experience that acknowledges the ambiguities, trials, and successes of life.

# Key Characteristics of Mature Adults

1. Mature adults are addressing the challenge of generativity (or its failure, stagnation)—establishing and guiding the next generation, striving to create or nurture things that will outlast them through caring for others, and creating and accomplishing things that make the world a better place.

2. Mature adults approaching older adulthood are addressing the challenge of integrity—reflecting on the life they have lived and coming away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair.

3. Mature adults are experiencing physical changes and decline, coming to terms with the cognitive changes related to a changed perspective on time and a personal, existential awareness of death. They are seeking to stay physically and mentally fit.

4. Mature adults are thinking about, planning for, and disengaging from their primary career occupations, launching second or third careers, and developing new identities and new ways to be productively engaged.

5. Mature adults are retiring from full-time work and planning for sufficient income that will last into their later adult years.

6. Mature adults are blending (part-time) work, volunteering and civic engagement, pursuit of new interests, travel, and their role as grandparent into a new lifestyle for the mature adult years.

7. Mature adults are concerned about having adequate health care into later life and providing for their own or a spouse/partner's long-term care needs.

8. Mature adults are establishing new patterns of relating to spouses, children, siblings, parents, and friends, leaving some existing relationships and beginning new ones.

9. Mature adults are experiencing changes in the marital relationship now that parenting responsibilities are minimal, developing adult-to-adult relationships between grown children and their parents, becoming grandparents, realigning relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren. They are caring for the older generation and dealing with disabilities and death.

10. Mature adults are moving to the very core of their faith tradition, while appreciating other religious traditions. They are seeking a self-reflective quest for individual wholeness, a search for depth and meaning, as well as guidance for living one's life. They tend to recognize that spirituality must be cultivated through sustained practice. Spirituality will be a significant aspect of the remainder of their lives.

11. Mature adults seek to be in service to others that is mission driven and can make a difference. They want do to do things that give their lives purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. They want to know their contributions truly matter.

12. Mature adults seek spiritual growth in a time of significant life transitions and in a time when they are searching for meaning and purpose in life as they enter the second half of life and evaluating the things that really provide lasting fulfillment. They desire meaningful relationships where people can connect with one another and talk about spiritual and life issues.

13. Mature adults seek intergenerational relationships to share their lives, stories, and faith across generations, and to be united with the whole faith community.

## Key Characteristics of Older Adults

1.   Older adults are remaining vital and actively engaged in the lives of their community, church, social network, and family well into their eighties and nineties. Many are still involved in leadership roles at church and in the community.

2.   Older adults are experiencing changes in their body and a decline in mental and physical ability, such as a loss of hearing or vision or dexterity. Some older adults experience varying degrees of dementia. For many older adults these mental and physical changes reduce their mobility resulting in isolation from others.

3.   Older adults are continuing to learn and process new information, and many live well into their nineties with memory and logic intact.

4.   Older adults are addressing the challenge of integrity—reflecting on the life they have lived and coming away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair. They are cultivating wisdom in which one's perspective on the world and human relationships reflect an inner sense of liberation from the rules, roles, and rituals of the past.

5.   Older adults are taking on new roles as senior citizens and adjusting to the role of mentor and sage in their extended family.

6.   Older adults are experiencing losses of friends and loved ones: death of a spouse, family members, and close friends.

7.   Older adults are facing the growing and continuous challenge of maintaining their independence, an issue of high priority for them, and the desire to stay in their own homes—"aging in place." Many will reluctantly come to accept being cared for by their family and moving from their own home into other living arrangements (with their children or in senior living or assisted living situations).

8.   Older adults have become the oldest generation in an extended family system comprising adult children, married children and their spouses, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

9.   Older adults are becoming reconciled to their impending death and accepting their personal mortality. They are dealing with questions coming from the nearness of death: What is life about? How do we want to die?

10.   Older adults have grown into a deeper more personal faith that is clearly their own and desire ways to continually enrich their faith life.

11.   Older adults are actively engaged in the life of faith communities. They prefer a more traditional worship experience with familiar hymns and words. They value the Bible and the Christian tradition and desire to continue their learning as Christians.

12.   Older adults have a hunger for God and a desire to continue growing spiritually.

# Guide 2

**Target the spiritual and religious diversity of adults.**

Adult faith formation programs, activities, and resources need to be *targeted* and *tailored* to the unique religious and spiritual profiles of adults. One way to view the diverse types of adult religiosity and faith practices is to place them on a continuum from adults with a vibrant faith and actively engaged to adults who are spiritual but not religious to those who unaffiliated and uninterested. (For more information see chapter 1 in *Faith Formation 2020* by John Roberto, LifelongFaith, 2010.)

| Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement | Occasional but Uncommitted | Spiritual but Not Religious | Unaffiliated and Uninterested |
|---|---|---|---|
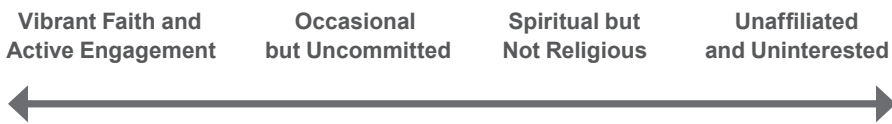
## Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first type describes adults who are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. These adults have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that engages adults—mind, body, heart, and spirit—in a diversity of ways to grow in faith for a lifetime and live their faith in the world.

## Participating Occasionally but Uncommitted

The second type describes adults who attend church activities, but are not actively engaged in their church community or spiritually committed. They may participate in significant seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, and celebrate sacraments and milestone events, such as marriage and baptism. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, these adults do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment. Congregations are challenged to provide faith formation that recognizes that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (spiritual commitment) and a more vibrant faith, and develop approaches for increasing people's engagement with the church community and the Christian tradition.

## Spiritual but Not Religious

The third type describes adults who are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but most likely are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service, or in online spiritual resources and communities. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among young adults. Congregations are challenged to become more missional—reaching people where their live (physical and online communities), building relationships, engaging in spiritual conversations, and offering programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth.

## Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The fourth type describes adults who experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated and Uninterested reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among young adults. Congregations are challenged to find ways to "plant" themselves in the midst of the cultures and worlds of the Unaffiliated and Uninterested, build relationships, and be witnesses to the Christian faith in the world today. Congregations need to develop strategies and approaches for moving faith formation from the church campus into the world.

The Spiritual but Not Religious and the Unaffiliated and Uninterested are a special focus of missional adult faith formation (see guide 10). Barna Research has identified three types of young adults in these categories:

- **Nomads.** The most common spiritual journey is that of the nomads. This group is comprised of eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds with a Christian background who walk away from church engagement, but still consider themselves Christians. A person in this group typically has trouble identifying with a church or a particular "brand" of Christianity but would consider themselves, broadly, a Christian. They say faith and religion just aren't that important to them. Many used to be very involved in their church, but they just don't fit in anymore. These are young adults who see themselves as personally interested in God and religion, but not really in a formal or institutional expression of that faith. This is the group most likely to say they love Jesus but not the church—or that they are "spiritual but not religious." They might appear to be wandering, but they would never claim to have lost their faith.

- **Prodigals.** Prodigals are those who have lost their faith. This group is made up of young adults who used to claim a personal faith, but no longer claim any Christian belief. They describe themselves as fairly certain they won't ever return to the Christian faith. Christian beliefs no longer make sense to them. Many admit to having had a negative experience in church or with Christians. They don't believe their spiritual needs can be met by Christianity. This is the group that most often gets lumped in with the "Nones," even though they might not be totally opposed to faith and spirituality. Rather, they have often had some kind of experience or realization that has made it impossible to reconcile their life with the Christian faith. Often this is either tied to some kind of intellectual change or emotional injury, leading to a long-term dismissal of the Christian faith.

- **Exiles.** This group has a tough time finding a place in a church setting, but has chosen to remain within an institutional church context. They feel "lost" somewhere between their commitments to church and their desire to stay connected with the world around them. These young adults with a Christian background struggle to connect their faith or church with their everyday lives, and yet they continue in their Christian faith despite these headwinds. They remain Christian and continue to attend a church, but they find that church to be a difficult place for them to live out their faith. This group is defined by wanting to figure out how to follow Jesus in the day-to-day aspects of their lives. They say God is more at work outside the church than inside the church, and they want to be a part of that ("Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials," Barna Research).

In *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*, Linda Mercadante conducted in-depth interviews with a cross section of the Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR). Mercadante organized the SBNR she interviewed into five types:

1. **Dissenters** are people who largely stay away from institutional religion. Some are "protesting dissenters" who are hurt, offended, or angry with organized religion; while others "drifted dissenters," those who simply drift out of organize religion and never go back.

2. **Casuals** are people whose religious or spiritual practices are primarily functional, i.e., a given practice, teaching, or guide helps them feel better.

3. **Explorers** are like spiritual tourists who enjoy the journey but do not plan to settle anywhere. Some explorers occasionally attend traditional or alternative services. Theologically, they are hybrids, mixing and matching seemingly disparate beliefs, techniques, and spiritual practices.

4. **Seekers** are searching for a spiritual home. Some contemplate reclaiming earlier religious identities, moving on to something slightly different, or joining a completely new religion or alternative spiritual group.

5. **Immigrants** have moved to a new spiritual "land" and are trying to adjust to this new identity and community. Adopting a new religion requires commitment, constancy, and group loyalty, characteristics that vie with the SBNR ethos (independence, freedom, non-dogmatism, and an open and questing attitude). Many people could not take the strong disjunction from their native upbringing and eventually dropped out. "Surprisingly often, the source of their discomfort was theological. A religious or spiritual group often makes certain belief assumptions these newcomers found difficult to fully embrace, even with much effort" (Mercadante 2014, 64).

SBNRs present a huge challenge for established churches. Those that provide the basics of what SBNRs look for—informality, nonhierarchical leadership, recognition of diversity, deep participation—are more likely to be comfortable for SBNRs. Mercadante emphasizes the need for churches to address "four theological loci—the sacred (God), human nature (theological anthropology), community (ecclesiology), and the afterlife (eschatology)—and bring SBNRs' misperceptions and challenges out into the open" (Mercadante 2012).

# Guide 3

**Offer a wide variety of programming to address the diversity of adults' lives.**

One of the key features of twenty-first century faith formation is providing a *variety* of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood. This includes providing a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections in a variety of learning environments that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces.

To address the increasing diversity within the adult population, churches need to offer a greater variety of adult faith formation topics and activities. In the past churches have often chosen the "one size fits all" mentality for adult faith formation: How do we get every adult to participate in a small faith-sharing group or to come to the Lenten series or to study the Bible? Adult faith formation is no longer about finding *the* program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with a variety of faith formation activities. It is offering faith formation programming that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing. It is meeting individuals at the point of their spiritual and learning needs and offering personalized pathways of faith growth. By expanding the options for adult learning (offering "something for everyone"), churches can

engage more adults in faith formation, even if some of the offerings involve only one person. The new reality of faith formation programming is that churches can offer activities that cater to niches— individuals and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue. They no longer have to worry about reaching a "mass audience."

Today, we can diversify faith formation offerings and tailor them to people's needs and busy lives. This movement from "one sizes 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 (website and social media) that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and programming with a variety of ways to learn that is easily accessible and available, anytime and any-where. Adult faith formation becomes personal, portable, and participatory—the key characteristics of the mobile technology revolution.

# Guide 4

**Use multiple environments for programming.**
Adult faith formation 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 a diver-sity of programs in different learning environments, as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments—all of which provides adults with more options to participate in adult faith formation and broadens the scope of faith formation offerings. The seven environments include: independent (on your own/self-directed), with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and 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.

## Independent (on your own/self-directed)

Independent programming provides maximum flexibility for the learner—when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning for busy adults. Congrega-tions can serve as guide to helping adults find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs, and then deliver that programming online at the church's faith formation website.

## With a Mentor

Mentoring provides a one-to-one relationship for faith formation that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or for those who want to explore Jesus and Christianity after leaving church earlier in life. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring older adults on the use of digital tools and media.

## At Home

At home programming provides individuals and whole families with faith formation programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life, and delivered through a faith formation website. This can include a wide variety of digital media and online programs and resources, such as online learning programs, resources for the church year seasons, Sunday worship resources, online communities and support groups, and links to online faith formation resources and resource centers.

## In Small Groups

Small group programming provides an excellent way to address the diversity of adult needs by organizing a variety of small groups with each one targeted to a particular need or topic. Small groups also provide lots of flexibility in schedule and location. Groups can meet at times and places that best fit members' lives, such as group that meets for breakfast weekly at the local restaurant or for coffee at a local coffee shop. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the congregation to sponsor small group programs. Congregational leaders can provide resources, support, and training for leaders, thereby enabling adults to organize their own small groups. Small group programming can take many different forms including:

- Discipleship or faith sharing groups or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological formation study groups, theme- or issue-oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith sharing groups, book study groups.
- Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups, and service/faith in action groups.
- Support groups such as parent groups, caregiving groups, and life transition groups.
- Ministry groups involved in leadership in the church and world.

Study-action small groups combine study with an experiential hands-on action project. One type of study-action model focuses on engaging adults in the ministry of justice and service, weaving together study, small group learning, retreat experiences, and action projects. (The programs from JustFaith Ministries: http://justfaith.org are a good example of this.) A second type of study-action model involves ministry or leadership groups that prepare for their particular ministry or leadership role through study accompanied by actual involvement. This type of learning involves a continuous cycle of study-action-study-action, as the adults' involvement in action generates new learning needs.

## In Large Groups

Large-group programming provides a way to serve a large number of adults on topics that appeal to a wide audience. Here is a sampling of large-group programming:

- Multi-session programs, such as multi-week courses on theological themes, books of the Bible, parenting at particular stages of family life, adult life issues).
- One-session program, such as a monthly session on a theological topic.
- Speaker series, such as a multi-evening or multi-week program focused around particular theological themes, Christian practices, current events, or the season of the church year.
- Roundtable discussions with refreshments after Sunday worship, such as exploring the Sunday Scripture readings in age groups or intergenerational groups.
- Parent parallel learning program at the same time as their children's program.
- Workshops, such as one day programs targeted to specific life issues—parenting, midlife issues, aging, and more.
- Film festivals that explore key themes such as relationships, social issues, and meaning in life (explore faith themes in the films).
- Field trips, such as visiting an art museum or attending a musical or theatrical performance (explore faith themes in art or music or drama).
- Retreat experiences in an evening, one-day, or weekend format at church or at a retreat center.
- Intergenerational programs for all ages in the congregation.

## In the Congregation

Congregational programming focuses on the events already present in the life of the church: 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. Faith formation can provide experiences for people 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. Congregational programming includes leadership and ministry in the congregation and to the world—providing the opportunity for faith formation to prepare people for leadership and ministry, and to reflect upon their engagement.

## In the Community and World

Programming in the community and world provides a way for congregations to utilize existing programs and activities outside the church as part of an adult faith formation plan. This involves researching the resources and programs being offered locally in the community (programs, courses, clinics, workshops, presentations, and more), at community colleges and universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, and more; and nationally/globally through national organizations, religious organizations, online resource centers, and more. This is an important environment for developing initiatives for serving, working for justice, and caring for creation. Many organizations—locally, nationally, and globally—have already created programs that be adopted by the congregation.

# Guide 5

**Enhance participation in programming by building on adult motivation and learning effectiveness.**

Research studies on adult learning point to motivation as a key factor in determining whether or not adults will participate in an adult faith formation offering. *The key motivation in adult learning is that adults are motivated to learn and grow as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.* The research tells us to be aware of a variety of adult motivations and design activities that utilize these motivational factors.

- Adults are motivated when facing life transitions. The most teachable moments in an adult's life have been found to be transitional times, when adults are negotiating critical passages. They seek learning and support to cope with changes in their lives that give rise to new developmental tasks, e.g., raising children, aging parents, financial matters, job changes, divorce, and so forth.
- Adults are motivated when there is a *gap* between their present level of understanding, skill, performance and/or growth and the desired level or goal that they set for themselves or that their organization or community expects of them.

- Adults are motivated by appealing to personal and spiritual growth and/or personal benefits.
- Adults are motivated when they identify they have a need to learn.
- Adults are motivated when the benefits of a learning experience outweigh their resistance.
- Adults are motivated when programs are enjoyable and enriching.
- Adults are motivated when they have the opportunity to do something they could not do before.
- Adults are motivated by settings that have a natural, interactive, communal feel.
- Adults are motivated when programs are sensitive to their time constraints by keeping commitments short in terms of duration and offering choices of times for participation.

Studies of motivation show that adults bring diverse attitudes and expectations to their learning experiences. There area at least four different orientations for learning: a *goal-orientation* in which learning is seen as leading to a change in work or personal status, an *activity-orientation* in which participants' social interactions are especially valued, *a learning-orientation* in which a love of learning underlies the learner's engagement and participation, and a *spiritual-orientation* in which learners seek new meaning and perceive education as the starting point for thinking in new ways (Schuster and Grant).

The literature on the characteristics of adult learners provides rich insight to what matters to adults when they engage in activities. As adults strive to become independent, self-directing, and competent, they thrive in environments that help them to transform their perspective and feel empowered to effect change in their lives. Adult learners are diverse and require learning programs that accommodate the full spectrum of learning needs, styles, and preferences. This means that adult faith formation needs to:

- Utilize adults' experience and prior knowledge. Adults learn best from their own experiences. Adults bring relevant religious knowledge and life experiences to a learning program. They need the opportunity to build on their knowledge, as well as to learn from each other. Adults use their knowledge from years of experience as a filter for new information that can function as a catalyst or barrier to learning something new.
- Respect the variety of learning styles of adults with a diversity of learning experiences, recognizing that some people 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. (See *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* by David Kolb.)

- Recognize the multiple intelligences of adults (linguistic, spatial, musi-cal, logical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist) and use learning methods and offer programs, activities, and resources that address the variety of intelligences. (See the work of Howard Gardner.) While it may be difficult to incorporate all eight intelligences in a par-ticular program or activity, offer programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different "intelligences"—one that is word-centered, another musical, another visual, and so forth.
- Incorporate activities that are realistic, stimulate thinking, and involve and challenge adults.
- Incorporate real-life application of learning. Adults are pragmatic; they learn best when they have an opportunity to apply theory/information to practical situations immediately in their own lives. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it. Providing ways for adults to practice what they are learning promotes the transfer of learning into their daily lives.
- Provide an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality to help build relation-ships among the adults. Adults learn and grow when they are physically comfortable and can socialize with others as they learn and when the cli-mate is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences. It is important to ask adults about their experiences, needs, and perceived barri-ers to learning and growing in faith. Adult faith formation needs to create an atmosphere that encourages self-esteem and interdependence.
- Develop a safe, relaxed, and comfortable environment. Adult programs need to provide for the adults' physical comfort, such as refreshments, lighting, and seating. Recent research shows that learning increases in an atmosphere that is the least reminiscent of any formal schooling. Adults appreciate physical settings that have been created for adults.

## Guide 6

**Design online and digitally enabled strategies into all programming.**

Adult faith formation is *digitally enabled*—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation and *digitally-connected*—linking intergen-erational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media.

Every congregation needs an adult faith formation website to provide the plat-form for publishing and delivering adult faith formation experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources, and to engage people in learning and faith formation. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive

providers of adult faith formation, but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to adults and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, and settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online.

Adult faith formation can utilize digital technologies and digital media to engage people with faith-forming content anytime, any place, and just-in-time. This can extend and expand faith formation in physical, face-to-face settings into people's daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms for adult faith formation (websites) integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365.

Adult faith formation can used blended models of faith formation to connect physical settings and online settings. The new digital tools, digital media, and online platforms connect adult participation in church life and events and in adult programs with their daily and home—and can reach adults at home, at work, and in daily life with personalized and customized faith formation content and experiences. Adult faith formation today can integrate 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.

## Blended Faith Formation Continuum

**ONLINE** ⟷ **FACE-TO-FACE**

| Fully Online | Mostly Online | Online & Gathered | Gathered & Online Content | Gathered with Online Content |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| An online program with all learning done online and limited face-to-face, gathered learning settings | A mostly online program with opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings | Online learning focused on presenting the content of the program *combined with* face-to-face, gathered sessions using active learning methods to discuss, practice and apply the content | A gathered event or program that provides online content and activities to extend and expand the learning from the gathered program | A gathered event or program that uses online content as part of the design of the event or program |

Imagine the possibilities for utilizing the five blended strategies in designing new adult programming, redesigning existing adult 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. (See chapter 1 for descriptions and examples of each of the five strategies on the continuum.)

# Guide 7

**Develop programming around the essential eight faith-forming processes.**
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 adults. These eight faith-forming processes are central to Christian lifelong faith formation. They provide a foundation and a framework for promoting growth in faith and discipleship. In the following description, Learning and Reading the Bible are combined, as are Worshipping and Celebrating the Seasons. (For adult programming ideas and examples for the eight faith-forming processes go to www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.)

## Caring Relationships

*Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and with peers in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.*

Cultivating caring relationships among adults (peers) and between adults and other generations (intergenerational) is an essential component of all adult programming. This includes an atmosphere of welcome, hospitality, and relationship-building in all adult programming. Caring relationships are developed in a variety of environments and programs—through a variety of small group programs and support groups, through mentoring relationships (older to younger, and younger to older), through intergenerational experiences in the church community, through storytelling and caring conversations among peers and intergenerationally, through spiritual companionship and spiritual direction, through social events (dinners, festivals, activities), and much more.

*Support groups* are an important element of adult faith formation—connecting faith and life, and integrating life issues and concerns with pastoral care and faith formation. Support groups can address the various circumstances and/or challenges people experience in their lives and offer the encouragement and assistance of others who are facing or who have faced similar situations and difficulties. Support groups can be developed or encouraged around a variety of adult life roles, issues, interests, and transitions, such as parents, caregivers, divorce and remarriage, unemployment, careers, and much more.

## Celebrating Milestones and Transitions

*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.*

Milestones are significant moments in life's journey that provide the opportunity for adults to experience God's love and grow in faith through sacred and ordinary events both in the life of the congregation and in daily life. Milestones faith formation has five elements:

1. *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that take place in daily life—beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage, and creating rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.

2. *Equipping* brings people together for learning, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. Opportunities are provided here to model faith practices for daily life and home life.

3. *Blessing* the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home, says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred. Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment: a prayer during worship for those participating in the milestone moment and a prayer at a small group or with family at home.

4. *Gifting* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.

5. *Reinforcing* the milestone with a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated.

Adulthood is filled with milestones and transitions. In times of transition, most people experience feelings of disorientation and tend to question personal priorities; they may seek to "finish unfinished business" or develop new dimensions of their lives. Addressing the needs of people in transition provides important opportunities for adult faith formation by bringing a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing. Adults are motivated when facing life transitions. They seek learning and support to cope with changes in their lives that give rise to new developmental tasks. Consider the following milestones and transitions in adulthood and the potential for developing adult faith formation around these events:

- graduating from college or technical school
- returning from military deployment
- getting married
- birth of a child/adoption of a child
- raising children
- owning a first home
- starting a new job/job changes
- anniversary of marriage
- financial matters
- divorce
- serious illness
- becoming a grandparent
- becoming an empty nest household
- retirement
- caring for an aging parent
- death of a spouse or family member

## Learning the Christian Tradition and Reading the Bible

*Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world. . . . 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.*

Adult programming focused on learning the Christian tradition and reading the Bible is developed around the principles of effective adult learning and can be offered in online and physical settings and in the seven learning environments. Adult programming facilitates a deeper sense of intimacy with Jesus, fosters a deeper understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith, and explores how the Bible and the Christian tradition provides wisdom for living a meaningful life today.

Adult programming can focus on a wide range of topics and themes relevant to adults at each stage of adulthood:

- *Life issues*: strengths and gifts development, finances and financial security, physical health and exercise, personal interests, marital relationship, family relationships, wellness, aging.
- *Milestones and life transitions*: marriage, birth/baptism of a children, jobs and careers, changing living situations, midlife crisis, illness, divorce, empty-nest household, becoming a grandparent, retirement, successful aging, becoming a caregiver.
- *Faith enrichment*: Bible study, Christian teachings, morality and ethics, Christian practices, theological exploration, sharing faith with children and grandchildren.

- *Spiritual enrichment*: spiritual life tasks at each stage of adulthood, prayer practices, spiritual disciplines, retreat experiences, aging as a spiritual process.

## Praying and Spiritual Formation

*Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.*

Adult programming can engage adults in learning about and practicing historic Christian spiritual disciplines and in developing a "rule of life" that allows for regular space for the practice of the spiritual disciplines. Adult programming can offer spiritual formation for adults that includes education in the spiritual disciplines and practices, retreat experiences, spiritual guides who serve as mentors on the spiritual journey, and resources on the spiritual disciplines and practices.

Churches can develop the spiritual life of all adults through the intentional teaching of spiritual practices and disciplines in age-appropriate ways by focusing on essential spiritual practices such as Lectio Divina, Scripture reflection, spiritual reading, contemplation, fixed-hour prayer, the examen, solitude and silence, Sabbath, praying with art and music, discernment, fasting, and prayer styles and traditions. Adult programming can utilize a variety of models to teach spiritual practices and disciplines, such as individualized growth plans, online spiritual formation centers and resources, one-on-one spiritual direction or mentoring, small group spiritual formation, retreats, and large group programs (courses, workshops).

Spiritual formation programming can be targeted to specific stages of life, such as programs, activities, and resources that encourage adults to explore a midlife crisis as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Programs and resources can help midlife adults reflect deeply on the path their lives have taken up to this point and about the goals they set earlier in life—career goals, community participation goals, intimacy goals, family goals, personal goals, and faith goals. These goals can be clarified and evaluated at midlife. How have they been met? Are they still unmet? Are they goals worth keeping? Are there new goals that need to be established?

Another example is "spirituality for the second half of life"—providing formation in spiritual disciplines and practices for the second half of life through educational programs, retreat experiences, spiritual guides who serve as mentors on the spiritual journey, and resources on the spiritual disciplines and practices.

## Serving, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation

*Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice, including community organizing for justice.*

Adult programming can offer service and justice projects that are *developmental* in scope with projects geared to different levels of involvement and challenge:

- Local mission projects lasting anywhere from a few hours to one day in length.
- Short-term mission trips lasting anywhere from two to five days and requiring an overnight stay on location.
- Weeklong mission trips within the United States as well as to foreign countries, designed for those who are ready to take the next big step in service.
- Global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days that provide the opportunity to be immersed for a longer period in the targeted community and culture.
- Personalized small group mission trips, organized around the interests and time of the group.

Adult service and justice programming incorporate social analysis and theological reflection with action projects to guide people in developing a deeper understanding of the causes of injustice and the teachings of Scripture and the Christian tradition. The process includes: 1) connect to a social issue (*experience*)—how people are personally affected by an issue or how the issue affects others, 2) explore the social issue (*social analysis*) to understand the causes and underlying factors that promote or sustain the issue; 3) reflect upon the teachings of Scripture and the Christian tradition (*theological reflection*) to develop a faith perspective on the social issue and how people of faith can address the issue; and 4) develop ways to address the issue (*action*) by working for social change and serving those in need as individuals, groups, communities, and/or organizations. The process can begin with a service involvement, leading to social analysis and theological reflection *or* it can begin with people's experience of a social issue, leading to analysis of the issue, connecting the issue to the faith tradition, and developing action projects of direct service to those in need, and social change and advocacy. (For more information on the process see *Social Analysis—Linking Faith and Justice* by Joseph Holland and Peter Henriot.)

## Worshipping and Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

*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. . . . 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.*

Authentic and meaningful worship enhances faith growth, and purposeful faith formation draws one into deeper and more profound worship. As the faith community journeys through the year, the events of church life provide an organic and natural sequence of faith learning for the whole community. Truly effective faith formation is anchored in the events of church life, the majority of which are marked and celebrated in the context of worship. How the community prays reveals how the community learns, and vice versa. Adult faith formation makes

worship and the seasons of the liturgical year central to programming, especially designing learning experiences that connect to Sunday worship and the content of the liturgical year feasts and seasons (see guide 8 below).

# Guide 8

**Incorporate intergenerational programming in adult faith formation.**
Intergenerational programming engages adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in intergenerational faith experiences. Adults 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* provide a natural rhythm and calendar to the curriculum: Advent and Christmas seasons, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lenten season, Holy Week, Easter, Easter season, Pentecost, All Saints and All Souls, and remembrances of saints and holy people throughout the year.
- *Sunday worship and the lectionary* provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its cycle of weekly Scripture readings.
- *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life.
- *Acts of service and justice*—locally and globally—provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teachings on service, justice, and care for the earth.
- *Prayer and spiritual traditions* provide times for reflection, praying as a community, and living the practices of the spiritual life through the community's life together.
- *Congregational events* that originate within the life and history of an individual congregation can create community.

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

**Second**, adult faith formation can connect adult-specific programming with engagement in the intergenerational life and events of the faith community. For example:

- Adults 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.
- Adults 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.
- Adults would learn about Jesus and the Christian tradition—teachings, history, practices, what it means for life today, and how to live the Christian faith; and experience the life of Jesus and the Christian tradition through participation in the events of church life, especially church year feasts and seasons.
- Adults 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.
- Adults 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 peers, with their families, and with their church and other groups and organizations.

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

- Incorporating intergenerational dialogues into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions. And then reversing the process and providing opportunities for the older adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Developing mentoring relationships between adults and children/youth, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvements, and confirmation mentors.
- Linking people of different generations (older-to-younger or younger-to-older) in the church who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to the other, such as midlife and older adults helping young adults and new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.
- Involving the community in praying for each generation, for example when people leave on a mission trip or retreat weekend or when people celebrate a milestone, such as the birth of a child, a marriage, a graduation, and a retirement.

- Organizing social and recreational activities that build intergenerational relationships, such as an intergenerational Olympics, a Friday night simple meal during Lent, or a summer film festival (maybe outdoors on a large screen).
- Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
- Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to support the efforts of groups who work directly with the poor.
- Developing intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God's creation, and build peace.
- Sponsoring community-wide service projects that engage all ages.

**Fourth**, it is important to involve parents, grandparents, and the whole family in the intergenerational faith community where their participation in church life can become a "laboratory" for immersing them 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 experienced—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.

# Guide 9

**Address the needs of families in each of the seasons of adulthood.**
At each stage of adulthood there are significant family life issues and transitions that can be the focus of adult faith formation programming. Congregations can assist parents and grandparents in nurturing faith family life, developing their faith life, strengthening family strengths and assets, and developing skills for parenting. Congregations can develop targeted faith formation strategies for single-person families (and to non-kindred adults living together as a family). This is an important need for older adults whose spouse or partner has died and is not a single-person family.
**First**, congregations 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. 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. Congregations can connect with families anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time by using digital content delivered to their mobile devices (phones and tablets). Ask: How are we providing 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, arts? This is possible today because of the abundance of faith-forming digital content available.

**Second**, congregations can focus on parents and grandparents. *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.

**Third**, congregations can strengthen family life by focusing on the assets that build strong families. In *The American Families Asset Study*, the Search Institute identified twenty-one key qualities, assets, which help all kinds of families become strong. When families have more of these research-based assets, the children, adolescents, and adults in the family do better in life. The Family Assets include:

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.

**Fourth**, congregations can assist parents and grandparents develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting. Parents and grandparents 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 coparent 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.

# Guide 10

**Design missional initiatives to reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.**

Adult faith formation is *missional*—expanding and extending the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live and providing 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.

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 on the potential for returning to church were: 1) developing relationships (an invitation from a trusted friend), 2) an appealing event—such as a concert or seminar—hosted at the church, and 3) reputational appeal as reflected in ministries that serve the poor and provide mentoring and development for young people. Two additional ideas had moderate appeal: participating in a house church rather than conventional church ministry, and participating in a gathering of people from their same age group and general lifestyle (Barna and Kinnaman, 155–159).

**First**, missional faith formation involves developing targeted approaches and strategies designed around the particular needs and life situations of the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. Congregations can reach the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated and uninterested by using adaptable strategies, such as the following:

- Develop 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.
- Create a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page (and other social media) to connect with people.
- Connect with people's life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life-skills courses, and more.
- Connect with people during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, and more.
- Develop 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.
- Organize 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.
- Sponsor community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips that are open to everyone so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.
- Create digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars that are offered online.

Make contact with those not engaged in the church community by establishing third-place settings in the community that offer hospitality, build relationships,

host spiritual conversations, provide programs and activities, and nourish the spiritual life of people. A third place is the ideal setting for groups to gather, each with its own focus. Some groups emphasize studying the Bible and deepening knowledge of the faith; others emphasize expressive and artistic activities (making music, creating art or writing poetry); others are organized around a lifestyle or common interest. Some are on a contemplative path (gathering for evening prayers or spiritual exercises), while others are on an active path (working at soup kitchens, tutoring kids, building houses). Program offerings can include spiritual formation programs, life-centered clinics and workshops (for example, marriage enrichment, parenting, divorce and separation, bereavement, life and career planning, financial planning, recovery programs, dealing with depression) and an "Introduction to the Christian Faith" program (see next paragraph).

**Second**, congregations can provide 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. One example of this process is an "Introduction to the Christian Faith" program—an opportunity for people to investigate the claims of the Christian faith in an informal, no pressure, nonjudgmental, and friendly environment. The emphasis is upon exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal setting and does not assume any background knowledge or belief in Christianity. It can offered in a variety of settings, formats, and times. (Programs like *The Alpha Course* and *Living the Questions* are examples of this.)

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 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.

**Third**, congregations can offer an apprenticeship in discipleship for adults who want to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian way of life. An "apprenticeship process" is designed to help adults grow as disciples by helping them understand who God is, what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to live in the Christian community. An apprenticeship often incorporates one-on-one mentoring, small group sharing, personal study, prayer, and retreat experiences.

**More Ideas and Resources**

Go to www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com to find programming ideas, articles on adult faith formation programming, case studies, examples of adult faith formation pro-gramming, and links to digital resources to use in adult programming.

———————————————————

**Works Cited**

Barna, George and David Kinnaman. *Churchless*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014 (also https://www.barna.org/churchless#.VMdqTcZLzds).

Epstein, Robert. "What Makes a Good Parent? A Scientific Analysis Ranks the 10 Most Effective Child-Rearing Practices." *Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2010.

Holland, Joseph, and Peter Henriot. *Social Analysis—Linking Faith and Justice*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983.

Kolb, David. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development,* Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall, 1984.

Mercadante, Linda. *Belief with Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Mercadante, Linda. "The Seeker Next Door." *Christianity Today*, May 30, 2012.

Roberto, John. *Faith Formation 2020*. Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith, 2010.

Schuster, Diane Tickton, and Lisa D. Grant. "What We Know about Adult Jewish Learning." *In What We Now Know about Jewish Education,* edited by Paul Vlexner, Roberta Louis Goodman, and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Publications, 2008.

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)

"Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials." Barna Research, May 9 2013. (https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/612-three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials.html#.VUParM5CRVs)