



Developing Lifelong Faith Formation Diocese of Bridgeport

Presenter: John Roberto, Vibrant Faith Leadership Team

Email: jroberto@lifelongfaith.com

VibrantFaith.org LifelongFaith.com

Every church wants vibrant, life-transforming faith formation for all ages and generations that promotes lifelong faith growth and discipleship. Our 21st century world presents churches and their leaders with significant challenges, but also new possibilities for creating dynamic faith formation.

The *Reimagine Faith Formation Project* is developed around the knowledge, practices, approaches, and skills for 21st century faith formation. It is designed to guide leaders in embracing a new vision for faith formation and implementing a comprehensive approach that will:

- ◆ engage all generations intergenerationally
- ◆ nurture family faith and equip parents to transmit faith to their children
- ◆ address the unique needs of people across the life cycle: children, youth, and adults
- ◆ develop missional outreach to the unaffiliated and uninvolved and invite people into discipleship and participation in the faith community
- ◆ utilize digitally-enabled and digitally connected approaches in faith formation

Program

1. A New Faith Forming Ecology for the 21st Century
2. Practices for 21st Century Faith Formation
3. Designing a Lifelong Plan for Faith Formation: New Models and Strategies
4. Using New Digital Methods and Resources in Faith Formation

5. Designing an Online Platform for Faith Formation Programming
6. Curating Religious Content and Experiences
7. Introducing Faith Formation Innovations into Church Life

Resources

Handouts/Resources/PowerPoint Presentations: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/lifelong-faith-formation.html>

Families at the Center of Faith Formation. Leif Kehrwald, Gene Roehlkepartain, Jolene Roehlkepartain, and John Roberto (LifelongFaith, 2016)

Generations Together. Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto (LifelongFaith, 2014)

Intergenerational Christian Formation. Holly Allen & Christine Ross (IVP Books, 2012).

Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century. John Roberto. Naugatuck: LifelongFaith, 2015.

The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World. Keith Anderson (Church Publishing, 2015)

The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. John Roberto, editor. Naugatuck: LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.

Families at the Center of Faith Formation website: <http://www.FamiliesattheCenter.com>

Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.

Program Plan

Program 1: *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*

Program #1 introduces the five elements of the new faith forming ecology which forms the foundation for developing a vibrant congregational culture in the 21st century. The new faith forming ecology is designed to: 1) engage all generations—intergenerationally; 2) nurture family faith and equips parents to transmit faith at home; 3) address the unique needs of age groups—children, youth, and adults; 4) develop missional outreach to the unaffiliated and uninvolved and invite people into discipleship and participation in the faith community; and 5) utilize online communities and resources, and digitally-enabled strategies for faith formation.

Program 2: *Envisioning Lifelong Faith Formation in Faith Communities*

1. Envisioning Lifelong Faith Formation
2. Innovative Approaches & Program Models for Lifelong Faith Formation: Designing Intergenerational Faith Formation, Designing Family Faith Formation, Designing Life Cycle Faith Formation from Childhood through Adulthood
3. Digitally Enabled and Digitally Connected Faith Formation
4. Envisioning: What Might Lifelong Faith Formation Look Like in our Parish Community?

Program 3: *Designing New Projects in Lifelong Faith Formation*

Program 4 (Webinar): *Implementing a Faith Formation Plan*

Program 5 (Webinar): *Launching a Faith Formation Plan*

Program 6: (Webinar): *Reviewing Progress*

Program 7. (Gathering): *Sharing Reports on Models and Impact*

Background

“An Agenda for the Future of Faith Formation”

John Roberto

We are on the doorstep of a new decade. So many of the trends and challenges we experience today were just emerging as this decade began: a ten-decade life span, the millennial generation starting families, baby boomers entering their “retirement” years, the younger generations leaving organized religion, multiple family structures and living arrangements, the diversity of ethnic cultures, the recognition of gender and sexual diversity, and more.

The arrival of a new decade is a good time to create an “agenda” for the future of faith formation. I am proposing seven areas for development on my agenda for the future. I believe these are important for the future of faith formation, and they are areas that I want to dedicate my time and energy. So here’s my agenda for action.

1. Developing a New Ecology of Christian Faith Formation

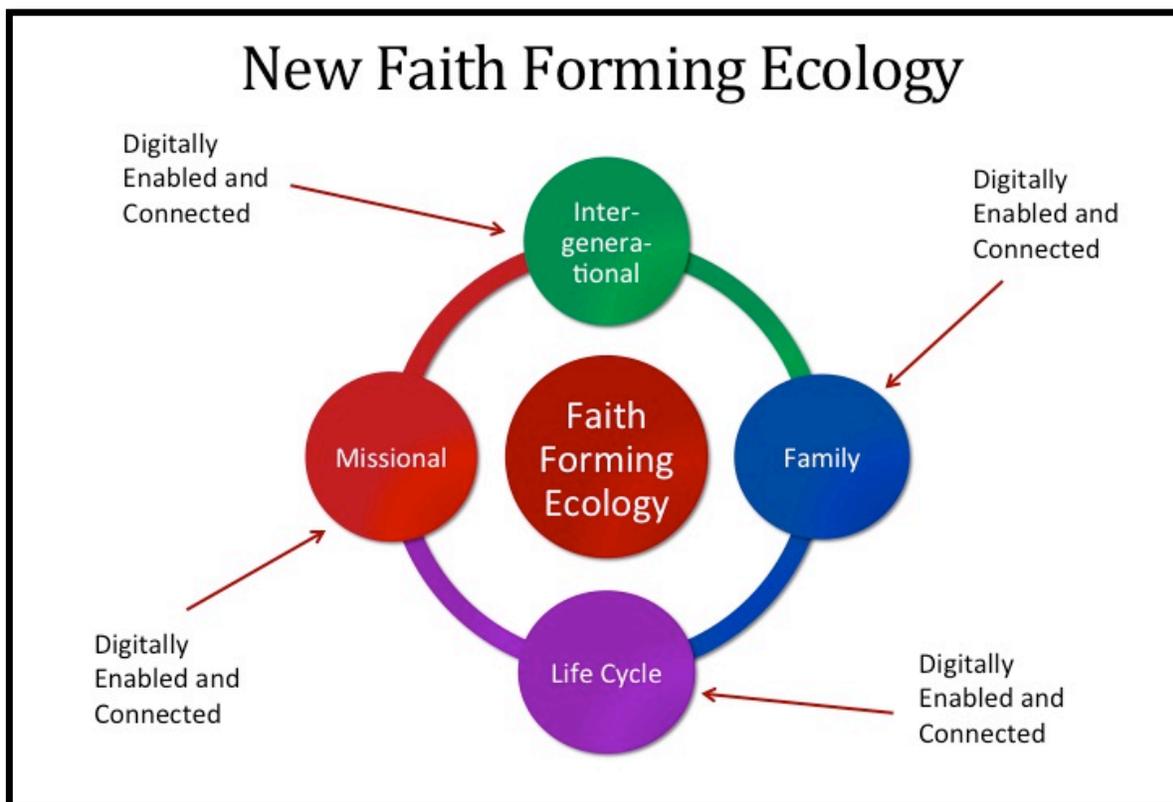
We know from research and practice that faith is formed in intergenerational faith communities, in families, in peer groups across the life cycle, and in missional settings where people are introduced to the Christian faith. We need to start thinking and acting ecologically in everything we do. For example,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

A new faith forming ecology must be responsive to the challenges of the twenty-first century world and the religious and spiritual needs of people today. I believe the new ecology needs to incorporate five, essential, interconnected components so that people are nurtured, equipped and supported in faith and discipleship. Each of these components must be attended to, so that a whole ecology can be created.

1. **Intergenerational faith formation** and whole community faith experiences for all ages and generations provide guided participation in a community of practice with intergenerational learning, relationships, and mentoring
2. **Family faith formation** incorporates growing in faith and practice as a whole family, nurturing the faith of children and adolescents at home, equipping parents (and grandparents) as faith formers, and engaging the whole family in the life and ministries of the faith community
3. **Life cycle faith formation** provides developmentally-appropriate and generationally-appropriate experiences, programs, and activities across the ten decades of life
4. **Missional faith formation** for the unaffiliated and uninvolved expands and extends the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people

where they live, and provides pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community

5. **Digitally enabled and connected faith formation** utilizes new digital technologies and media to reach and engage people in their daily lives anytime and anywhere, and expands faith formation through blended models combining online delivery of religious content and experiences with gathered events and programs.



2. Focusing on Faith Maturing

We need to focus faith formation on the essential characteristics of lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship. These characteristics would incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. With a lifelong vision of maturing faith we could address each characteristic in developmentally-appropriate ways at each stage of life. For example, if “*sustaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing and Bible reading*” was one of these faith maturing characteristics, the task of faith formation would be to ask how we can accomplish this with children, youth, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults. In this approach we would build our “curriculum” around the people and the faith maturing characteristics.

3. Personalizing Faith Formation

We need to tailor faith formation to the individual journeys of children, youth, young adults, adults, and families in order to address their increasing spiritual and religious diversity and life stage needs. One of the latest educational innovations is personalized learning, i.e., tailoring the educational environment—

the what, when, how and where people learn—to address the individual needs and interests of each person. To personalize faith formation we need to create “faith growth pathways” that use the faith maturing characteristics and, with the help of a mentor or small group, guide people in discerning their faith growth needs. For example, if we took the characteristic “*seeking spiritual growth by actively pursuing questions of faith, learning what it means to believe in God, and what it’s like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ*” we could provide a tool that helps them discover their faith growth needs using a continuum from “exploring” to “getting started” to “making progress” to “going deeper” with short illustrations for each one. In this approach we would then develop a personalized faith growth plan—or what educators are now calling “playlists”—of content (print, audio, video, online) and direct experiences to address their needs.

4. Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational

We need to become intentional about strengthening the intergenerational character of our congregations and faith formation experiences. We can create a plan that (1) *utilizes* the intergenerational events and experiences of church life (community life events, worship and the lectionary, seasons of the year, service and mission projects, prayer and spiritual formation) as a primary “content” in faith formation by *preparing* people with the knowledge and practices for participating, by *engaging* people in the event, and by *reflecting* upon the meaning of the event and how to *live/practice* in daily life; (2) *infuses* intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing ministries and programs, such as age group programs; 3) *connects* the generations through new intergenerational programs and experiences that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. One area ripe with possibilities is to develop grandparent-grandchildren programming, such as a VBS, summer camp, service/mission projects, field trips, and more.

5. Empowering and Equipping Parents and the Family

We all know how important parents and the whole family are in the faith forming process. Today’s families—of Gen Z children and teens, and Millennial and younger Gen X parents—present new challenges and opportunities. We will need to create new faith formation initiatives for the home, and learn from them what approaches and practices work best. There are proven strategies that can guide the development of comprehensive plan for family faith formation including: (1) *At Home*: discovering God in everyday life, forming faith practices, and celebrating milestones and rituals; (2) *In the Faith Community*: celebrating seasonal events, encountering God in the Bible, and connecting families intergenerationally (learning, service, community life); and (3) *With Parents*: developing a strong family life, and empowering parents and grandparents as faith formers. With the new digital tools and media we have the ability to reach today’s parents and families anywhere and anytime with engaging and interactive faith forming content. (See *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* for the strategies.)

6. Designing Twenty-First Century Learning Experiences

We can dramatically improve our effectiveness in promoting faith growth and learning by using the new approaches and methods that are being designed by educators for twenty-first century learners of all ages—children, youth, and adults. We know today’s younger generations learn best in environments

that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. Among today's most promising educational innovations are *personalizing learning* (see #3), *blended learning* and *flipped learning*, *micro-learning*, and *immersive learning*. All of these new approaches and methods are enhanced by the use of digital technologies, methods, and media.

Blended Learning integrates learning in physical and online settings where a person has some control over time, place, path, and/or pace of the learning experience. One form of blended learning is *Flipped Learning* in which the content moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space (usually online), and the group space is transformed into an interactive learning environment for discussion and application. Congregations are already flipping confirmation preparation (learning online plus interactive group activities in gathered settings), extending gathered events with online content for continued learning, and providing online faith formation or live webinars for individuals or groups.

Micro-learning experiences are short-form—5, 10, 15 minute—learning experiences designed for anywhere, anytime learning that be combined into multi-part learning programs. Micro-learning experiences are one response to short attention spans and mobile learning. We can curate a series of micro-learning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content.

With the rise of anytime, anywhere faith formation content we need to ask what is the role of gathering people for faith formation. Today children (and their parents), youth, and adults can access online most of the content that we teach at church. One response to this new situation is to focus our gathered activities on creating *Immersive Learning*—faith-forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. We have already been offering these types of experiences—vacation Bible school, retreats, mission trips, and more. What if we expanded our immersive learning opportunities and focused our gathered settings on immersive faith formation in extended settings (half-day, full day, weekend, weeklong) offered throughout the year (but not weekly).

7. Embracing New Leadership Roles

We need to develop new leadership roles to match with the new approaches to faith formation in the twenty-first century. We are blending “traditional” roles like developing religious content, designing programming, managing programming, and teaching/facilitating programming with three new roles: *Architect*, *Curator*, and *Digital Designer*. We are becoming *learning architects* who design and/or identify environments which can become settings for faith formation, e.g., homes, workplaces, coffee shops, online communities, and more. We can design content and experiences to “deliver” to that setting. We are becoming *designers of digital platforms* (websites, social media) where people can connect with each other, access content, engage in learning activities, and more. These platforms provide 24x7 faith formation. While we may not personally possess these new digital skills, our congregations most likely have people who do. We are becoming *curators* of religious content and experiences. When there is an abundance of content, our role shifts from creator to curator. Curators are engaged in finding and identifying high quality content in all formats, matching it with the needs of people, providing the content on a digital platform (and often in gathered settings), and engaging people with the content.

Congregational Faith Formation Assessment

The Congregational Faith Formation Assessment tool provides a way for your congregation to examine how it is forming faith through congregational life, family faith formation, age-group faith formation, missional faith formation and leadership. Engage the whole team (and other leadership groups) in completing the assessment tool. Rate each item on a scale from poor practice (1) to excellent practice (4). Items that receive a rating of 4 (excellent) or 3 (good) indicate areas of strength. Items that receive a 2 (adequate) or 1 (poor) indicate areas for growth. Analyze the results and circle the items that are in need of attention and development (scores of 1 or 2) and items that your congregation wants to strengthen even if it received a score of 3 (good).

Part 1. The Congregation Creates a Faith Forming Culture

	Practice			
	1=poor	2	3	4=excellent
1. God's Living Presence: People experience God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.	1	2	3	4
2. Discipleship: People learn who God is and come to know Jesus Christ personally; learn how to be Christian; and how to discover the meaning of the Bible for their lives.	1	2	3	4
3. Community: People experience a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love; characterized by hospitality, welcoming, love, and support.	1	2	3	4
4. Worship: People experience spiritually uplifting worship experiences that are enlightening, fulfilling, inspiring, interesting, easy to understand, and relevant in daily life.	1	2	3	4
5. Liturgical Seasons: People experience the Story of Faith through the celebration of the feasts and seasons of the church year.	1	2	3	4
6. Rituals and Milestones: People experience God's love through rituals, sacraments, and milestones that celebrate significant moments in one's life and faith journey.	1	2	3	4
7. Prayer: People experience the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and spiritual disciplines/practices.	1	2	3	4
8. Learning: People grow in faith understanding by learning the content of the Christian tradition, reflecting upon that content, integrating it their lives, and living its meaning in the world.	1	2	3	4
9. Moral Responsibility: People develop ethical/moral responsibility—learning about Christian perspectives on moral questions and how to apply their faith to decisions about what's right and wrong.	1	2	3	4
10. Service & Justice: People are engaged, locally and globally, in serving those in need, working for justice, and caring for God's creation.	1	2	3	4
11. Intergenerational Relationships: People develop intergenerational relationships and community where the Christian faith is shared, modeled, and lived.	1	2	3	4
12. Intergenerational Faith Experiences: People are engaged in intergenerational faith experiences and activities of worship, prayer, learning, and service as an integral aspect of congregational life.	1	2	3	4
13. Digital Ministry: People can grow in faith and discipleship through online faith forming content and social connections on the congregation's website(s) which provides content and experiences to extend participation in congregational life and ministries into daily life.	1	2	3	4

Part 2. The Congregation Equips Parents and Families

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent			
14. Parental Faith: The congregation helps parents and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship, and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.	1	2	3	4
15. Parenting for Faith Growth: The congregation teaches parents and grandparents the knowledge and skills for forming faith at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible.	1	2	3	4
16. Parenting: The congregation equips parent and grandparents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting today, and how to develop a develop a close, warm, and affirming parenting style that promotes religious transmission at home.	1	2	3	4
17. Family Faith Experiences: The congregation provides whole family experiences that promote growth in faith and discipleship, and teach parents how to share faith and live faith practices at home.	1	2	3	4
18. Family Faith Practices: The congregation provides families with resources to nurture growth in Christian faith and practice at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible	1	2	3	4
19. Family Assets: The congregation strengthens family life by developing the assets that build strong families: nurturing family relationships, establishing family shared activities and traditions, maintaining family expectations and rules, adapting to daily challenges, and connecting to the community.	1	2	3	4
20. Digital Ministry with Families: The congregation connects with families at home through an online ministry (family website, social media) that provides social interaction and a variety of content (print, audio, video, websites) for family faith practices, parent faith formation, parenting, and family asset development.	1	2	3	4

Part 3. The Congregation Embraces Lifelong Faith Growth & Practice

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent			
21. Lifelong: The congregation provides a continuity of ministry and faith formation across the whole lifecycle from children through older adults that promotes growth in Christian faith and discipleship in age-appropriate ways at each stage of life.	1	2	3	4
22. Programming: The congregation offers a variety of age-specific experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections for every stage of life that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces, and conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.	1	2	3	4
23. Online: The congregation uses their own website(s), as an integral component of age-group ministry and faith formation, that extends gathered ministries/programs through online content (print, audio, video) and experiences, blends online and gathered activities in individual programs, and offers online-only programs, activities, and resources—all of which are available anytime, anywhere.	1	2	3	4
24. Children: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of children through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1	2	3	4

25. Youth: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of youth through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1 2 3 4
26. Young Adults: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of young adults through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1 2 3 4
27. Adults: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of adults through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1 2 3 4

Part 4. The Congregation Engages in Missional Outreach

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent
28. Outreach: The congregation expands and extends the church’s presence through outreach, relationship building, and engagement with people who are not engaged in the faith community – the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.	1 2 3 4
29. Outreach: The congregation offers faith formation targeted to the needs of the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated.	1 2 3 4
30. Pathways: The congregation provides pathways (programs, activities, experiences) 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 – guiding people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment.	1 2 3 4

Part 5. The Congregation Has Faithful, Competent Leadership

	Practice 1=poor 4=excellent
31. Spiritual Influence: The pastor and ministry leaders know and model the transforming presence of God in their lives and ministries.	1 2 3 4
32. Interpersonal Competence: The pastor and ministry leaders build relationships and community in the congregation, as well as in their ministries and programs.	1 2 3 4
33. Competent Leadership: The pastor and ministry leaders demonstrate effective leadership by modeling the way—aligning values and actions, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process—being innovative and experimenting, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart of others—affirming and celebrating contributions.	1 2 3 4
34. Competent Ministry: The pastor and ministry leaders reflect superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill for leadership in the congregation and their ministries.	1 2 3 4
35. Volunteer Leadership: The pastor and ministry leaders nurture the faith and theological knowledge of volunteer leaders, equip them with knowledge and skills for their ministry, and provide continuing support and mentoring	1 2 3 4

Congregational Faith Formation Profile

Part 1. Intergenerational

Identify the ways that your congregation nurtures faith through intergenerational faith forming experiences: relationships, community life, worship, learning, service, prayer, etc.

Part 2. Family

Identify the ways that your congregation nurtures family faith at home and through church events, programs, and activities, and how the congregation equips and supports parents.

Part 3. Lifecycle Faith Formation

Identify the ways that your congregation nurtures the faith of children, adolescents, and adults.

Children	Adolescents	Adults

Part 4. Missional

Identify the ways that your congregation engages in missional outreach and relationship building, and provides pathways for people to explore the Christian faith and discipleship.