FAMILIES AT THE CENTER OF FAITH FORMATION

John Roberto
LifelongFaith Associates
jroberto@lifelongfaith.com  www.LifelongFaith.com
www.FamiliesAtTheCenter.com

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Wondering . . .

• What does a vibrant and vital family faith look like in a 21st century world?
• How do we meaningfully engage/connect with today’s families?
• How do we empower/equip/resource families to transmit faith at home - to practice a vital and vibrant faith?
• How do we reach families who are not involved in a faith community or feel religion is not important?

What’s Changing?

1. Diversity of Family Forms: No single family arrangement encompasses the majority of children today.
   ✓ Two-parent, married couple households are on the decline.
   ✓ Children and adolescents live in a variety of family arrangements that change and evolve over the course of a child’s life.
What’s Changing?

2. **Generational Diversity**: Gen X Parents (mid 30s-mid 50s) and Millennial Parents (20s-mid 30s)
   - Generational approaches to parenting and family life
   - Gen X parents approach child-rearing as a set of tangible practices that will keep their children safe, reasonably happy, well-behaved, and ready to take on life’s challenges. They practice *protective parenting*.
   - Millennial parents, reflecting their values of individuality and self-expression, focus more on a democratic approach to family management, encouraging their children to be open-minded, empathetic, and questioning—and teaching them to be themselves and try new things. They are moving away from the overscheduled days of their youth, preferring a more responsive, less directorial approach to activities. *(Responsive Parenting)*

What’s Changing?

3. **Ethnic Diversity**: A growing diversity of ethnicities and nationalities in society and churches
   - Millennial generation is America’s most ethnically diverse
   - Distinct ethnic identities, histories, religious traditions, and practices
   - Distinct needs as a family
What’s Changing?

4. **Spiritual-Religious Diversity:** Parents and families reflect an increasing diversity in religious beliefs, practices, and affiliation.
   - 23% of Generation Xers and over 34% of Millennials are not religious affiliated and the number of unaffiliated Millennials is growing.
   - Families of Generation X and Millennial parents are participating less in church life and Sunday worship. Religion and spirituality may be important to families today, but for many it is not usually expressed by participation in churches.
What’s Changing?

- Significant indicators, such as religious identification as a Christian, worship attendance, marriages and baptisms in the church, and changing generational patterns, point to a decline in family religious socialization across all denominations.
- There is also a decline in religious traditions and practices at home. Gen X and Millennial parents often lack the religious literacy and religious experiences necessary for faith transmission.
What Makes a Difference in Faith Growth?

1. Parents’ personal faith and practice
2. Parent-child relationship: close, warm
3. Parents’ modeling and teaching a religious faith
4. Parents’ involvement in church life and Sunday worship
5. Grandparents’ religious influence & relationship
6. Religious tradition a child is born into
7. Parents of the same faith
8. Family conversations about faith
9. Family religious practices: prayer, reading the Bible, service to others, celebrating holidays/rituals
Transforming Our Narrative: Families at the Center

1. See the home as the essential & foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.

2. Reinforce the family’s central role in promoting healthy development and faith growth; enhancing the faith-forming capacity of parents and grandparents.

3. Express care with the families in our congregations and communities, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them.

4. Provide support and advocacy when families really need it.

5. Share power with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals.
Transforming Our Narrative
Families at the Center

6. Build faith formation around the lives of the today’s families and parents, rather than having the parish prescribe the programs and activities that families will participate in.
7. Address the diversity of families by moving away from “one size fits all” programs and strategies toward a variety of programs and activities tailored to the unique life tasks and situations, concerns and interests, and religious-spiritual journeys of parents and families.
8. Offer regular gatherings of all our families for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.

9. Engage families together with the whole community for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.
10. Find ways to reach families at home with support, resources, and activities to develop family life and grow in faith.
11. Strengthen families by helping them develop the practices and skills for healthy family life.
12. Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for effective parenting and forming faith in young people.
Transforming Our Narrative:
The Family as School of Discipleship

It is in the domestic household that we eat, sleep, bathe, get dressed, relax and converse with others. In the context of the household we learn basic social conventions, from table manners to the demands of hospitality toward guests. In the household we learn how to be accountable for our lives; we learn when we are expected for dinner (or to prepare dinner); we learn what chores and other miscellaneous responsibilities are assigned to us and how the smooth functioning of the household depends on the fulfillment of those chores and responsibilities. More importantly, in many households we learn about the possibilities for committed, appropriately vulnerable relationship with others and the privileges and responsibilities that those relationships bring. It is in this nexus of patterned relationships which constitutes the household that we can better understand the image of the Christian household as a “school of discipleship.”
(Richard Gaillardetz)

Transforming Our Practice

1. A **variety** of relationships, content, experiences, and resources
2. New **methods**: immersive, multimedia, multi-sensory, highly visual, participatory, experiential
3. New **formats**: episodic, micro-learning, on demand, mobile, 24x7,
4. New **digital** media and digital platforms
5. Multiple **environments**: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.
Transforming Our Practice

1. Diversity of Family Forms
2. Variety of Spiritual-Religious Identities
   Engaged----Occasionals----Spirituals----Unaffiliated
3. Generational Parenting Approaches
   • Gen X parents—Protective Parenting
   • Millennial parents—Responsive Parenting
4. Diversity of Ethnicities

Transforming Our Practice
Digitally Enable & Connected
Families at the Center Strategies

1. God in Everyday Life
2. Faith Practices @Home
3. Milestones
4. Seasonal Events
5. Intergenerational Connection
6. Strong Family Life
7. Parents & Grandparents as Faith Formers
A Family Network - Mozel Tot
www.mazeltot.org

Family Faith Formation Network

Families at the Center of Faith Formation
A Network of Experiences, Activities & Resources for families with Children
Curating & Creating Family Resources

### Current Roles
- Developing religious content
- Designing programming
- Managing programming
- Teaching/Facilitating programming

### Emerging Roles
- Designing faith forming environments — architecture
- Designing Digital Platforms for faith forming content
- Curating faith forming content & experiences

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**STARTING POINTS**
EIGHT STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES AT THE CENTER FAITH FORMATION

Eight Strategies

1. Discovering God in Everyday Life
2. Forming Faith at Home through the Life Cycle
3. Forming Faith through Milestones
4. Celebrating Seasonal Events through the Year
5. Encountering God in the Bible through the Year
6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally
7. Developing a Strong Family Life
8. Empowering Parents and Grandparents
#1. Discovering God in Everyday Life

- Everyday experiences are the core resources of spiritual narratives, even for those affiliated with traditional religious institutions
- “People feel most connected to whatever they understand as God, the divine, a Higher Power when they’re deeply engaged in the fabric of everyday life, spending time with family, with friends, preparing and sharing food, enjoying their pets.”

Spiritually meaningfully practices:
1. enjoying time with family
2. enjoying time with friends
3. enjoying time with pets or other animals
4. preparing and/or sharing food/meals
5. praying
6. enjoying nature
7. listing to/playing music
8. enjoying/creating art
9. physical activity/sports
10. yoga and meditation

On the list of 25 items, the last three items were reading/studying scripture, attending worship, and attending a non-worship activity, event or meeting at church.
# 1. Discovering God in Everyday Life

Spirituality “may be the name for a longing for more meaning, more feeling, more connection, more life. When I hear people talk about spirituality, that seems to be what they are describing. They know there is more to life than what meets the eye. They have drawn close to this ‘More’ in nature, in love, in art, in grief. They would be happy for someone to teach them how to spend more time in the presence of this deeper reality. . . .”

“. . . the last place most people look is right under their feet, in the everyday activities accidents, and encounters in their lives. . . . the reason so many of us cannot see the red X that marks the spot is because we are standing on it”.

# 1. Discovering God in Everyday Life

. . . . To make bread or love, to dig in the earth, to feed an animal or cook for a stranger—these activities require no extensive commentary, no lucid theology. All they require is someone willing to bend, reach, chop, stir. Most of these tasks are so full of pleasure that there is no need to complicate things by calling them holy. And yet these are the same activities that change lives, sometimes all at once and sometimes more slowly, the way dripping water changes stone. In a world where faith is often construed as a way of thinking, bodily practices remind the willing that faith is a way of life.”
Discovering God in Everyday Life

1. **Embed and Equip**
   Worship, learning, sacraments, retreats, and more

2. **Create and Sponsor**
   Family/intergenerational programs
   Small group experiences

3. **Equip and Resource**
   Print, audio, and video resources for discovering God and for living practices in everyday life

4. **Connect and Engage**
   New settings for spiritual conversations

#2. Forming Faith at Home

**A Household Curriculum**

**Content:** Eight Faith Forming Processes

**Settings:** Home, Intergenerational, Church Life, Parents

1. Home: What are families doing to grow in faith and discipleship in each of the eight faith forming processes?
2. Intergenerational: How are families connected to the other generations at church?
3. Church: How are congregations empowering, resourcing, and supporting families to grow as disciples & practice their faith?
4. Parents: How are congregations empowering, resourcing, and supporting parents as faith formers?
2. Faith Forming at Home

**Developmentally-Appropriate:** Content accommodated to the needs and interests of each stage and to the way young people think and assimilate information and values at each life stage.

1. young children (0-5)
2. older children (6-10)
3. young adults (11-14)
4. older adolescents (15-18)
5. emerging adults (19-29)

### 2. Faith Forming at Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage:</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Intergenerational</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Parents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring Relationships</td>
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<td>Celebrating Seasons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrating Rituals &amp; Milestones</td>
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<td>Learning the Christian Tradition</td>
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<td>Praying &amp; Spiritual Formation</td>
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<td>Reading the Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serving/Working for Justice</td>
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<td>Worshipping God Together</td>
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</table>
#3. Forming Faith through Milestones

- First Year - Baptismal Remembrance (A Gathering for newly baptized)
- Toddlers - Creation (Care for the World God made)
- Pre-School One - Bible (Reads a story Bible)
- Pre-School Two - Worship (Proclaim Christ and the Giver of life)
- Pre-K/K - Service (Serve your neighbor as Jesus commanded)
- 1st Grade - Lord’s Prayer (Learn about prayer)
- 2nd Grade - First Communion (Share in the Lord’s Supper)
- 3rd Grade - Bible (Receive a more age-appropriate Bible)
- 4th Grade - Baptism (Learn about Lutheran Baptism)
- 5th Grade - Ten Commandments (What do they really mean?)
- 6th Grade - Apostle’s Creed (What do Lutherans believe?)
- 7th Grade - Bible (Receive a Bible with commentary & questions)
- 8th Grade - Elder Wisdom (Faith through the generations)
- 9th Grade - Sexuality (Living and serving our neighbor)
- 10th Grade - Affirmation of Baptism (Public affirmation of promises)
- 11th Grade - Vocation (Live among God’s people with care)
- 12th Grade - Real World (Tasks for living on our own, importance of faith)

#3. Celebrating Milestones

- Birth / Baptism
- Starting School Year
- First Communion
- Receiving a first Bible
- Confirmation
- Graduation (HS, College)
- Engagement
- Wedding
- Retirement
- Death / Funeral
#3. Celebrating Milestones

1. a ritual celebration or a blessing marking the milestone with the whole church community
2. a home ritual celebration or blessing marking the milestone
3. a learning program, often for the whole family or intergenerational, that prepares the individual and the whole family for the milestone and for faith practice at home
4. a tangible, visible reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked
5. resources to support continuing faith growth and practice after the milestone

#3. Celebrating Milestones: Baptism

**Church**
- Mentors/Coaches
- Parent preparation
- Family gathering
- Ritual
- Intergenerational connection
- Celebration of Baptism
- Reunion
- Baptismal anniversaries

**Home**
- Caring conversations and storytelling
- Celebrating rituals
- Learning
- Praying
- Reading the Bible
- Serving
- Worshipping together
#4. Celebrating Seasons

## Calendar Year
- New Year’s Eve and Day
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Valentine’s Day
- St. Patrick’s Day
- Earth Day
- Mother’s Day
- Memorial Day
- Father’s Day
- July 4 – Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Start of School
- Halloween
- Thanksgiving

## Church Year
- Advent
- Christmas
- Epiphany
- Ash Wednesday
- Lent
- Holy Week
- Easter
- Pentecost
- St. Francis Day–Blessing the Animals (October 4)
- All Saints and Souls (Nov 1-2)

## Example: 40-Day Lent Curriculum

### Church Life ➔ Daily & Home Life ← Online Life

**Church Life**
- Ash Wednesday
- Lenten Sunday liturgies
- Stations of the Cross
- Lenten prayer
- Lenten retreat
- Lenten service
- Lenten soup suppers

**Daily & Home Life**
- Fasting
- Praying
- Service/Almsgiving
- Lectionary reflection
- Family activities

**Online Life**
- Lenten learning resources
- Lenten calendar
- Daily Lenten prayer
- Weekly table prayer
- Video resources
- Online retreat experience
Example: Earth Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Community cleanup</td>
<td>• Ecumenical prayer service</td>
<td>• Recycling activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planting a community garden</td>
<td>• Intergenerational program on theology of caring for creation</td>
<td>• Planting a family garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All ages workshop on caring for creation</td>
<td>• Church audit</td>
<td>• Meal time creation prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Story time at the library on environmental awareness</td>
<td>• Global project for whole community</td>
<td>• Daily Bible verses for April</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#5. Encountering God in the Bible

1. Scripture in Sunday Worship
   • Lectionary
   • Sermon Series

2. Exploring the Bible—Family or Intergenerational Programs
   • A Tour of the Old Testament
   • A Tour of the Gospels
   • Walking with Jesus
   • Journeys of Paul
#5. Encountering God in the Bible

**Scripture in Sunday Worship**
**Intergenerational & Home Faith Formation**

September: 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
October: 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November: 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time  
December: 2nd Sunday of Advent  
January: Baptism of the Lord Sunday  
February: 1st Sunday of Lent  
March: Palm Sunday  
April: 4th Sunday of Easter  
May: Holy Trinity Sunday
#6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally

1. Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational
   - Identify ways families are current connected and engaged intergenerationally in the faith community
   - Develop ways to strengthen IG connection and engagement
   - Create new ways to connect and engage families

2. Intergenerational and Family Learning

3. Intergenerational Family Service

#6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally: Learning
#6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally: Learning

1. Bible Study
2. Family Time
3. Worship Skills
4. Recreation

GenOn Ministries

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A flexible, relaxed arrival time with drinks and snacks

Creative exploration of a Bible story/theme through creative experiences for people of different learning styles and of all ages. Children and adults are not separated and are encouraged to explore the story/theme together

A short but explicit time of worship with story, music and prayers that builds on the creative exploration.

A generous welcome and hospitality is expressed through a delicious home-cooked, sit-down meal with others
#6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally: @ Home

- Learning - Going Deeper
- Family Conversation
- Serving/Action Ideas
- Reading the Bible
- Rituals
- Prayer/Devotion

#7. Developing a Strong Family Life

Family faith formation strengthens family life by developing the assets/strengths and skills for healthy family life and providing a supportive context for forming faith, living the Christian faith, and promoting positive development in children and youth.

- Developing family assets or strengths
- Promoting character strengths in young people through developmental relationships.
#7. Developing a Strong Family Life

**Family Assets – Search Institute**

**Nurturing RELATIONSHIPS**
- Positive communication
- Affection
- Emotional openness
- Support for sports

**Establishing ROUTINES**
- Family meals
- Shared activities
- Meaningful traditions
- Dependability

**Maintaining EXPECTATIONS**
- Openness about tough topics
- Fair rules
- Defined boundaries
- Clear expectations
- Contributions to family

**Adapting to CHALLENGES**
- Management of daily commitments
- Adaptable
- Problem-solving
- Democratic decision making

**Connecting to COMMUNITY**
- Neighborhood cohesion
- Relationships with others
- Enriching activities
- Supportive resources
#7. Developing a Strong Family Life

**Create a Family Life Plan for Each Life Cycle Stage**
Using the Family Assets and Developmental Relationships, curate and create developmentally-appropriate programs, activities, and resources for families at each stage.
1. Family website
2. Parent programs
3. Family programs
4. Family mentors
5. Life cycle support groups for parents
#7. Developing a Strong Family Life

- Parent Program (*Keep Connected*)
- Family Programming
  1. Communicating effectively
  2. Establishing family routines: family meals, shared activities, daily commitments
  3. Celebrating meaningful traditions and rituals
  4. Discussing tough topics
  5. Making decisions and solving problems as a family
  6. Learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other
  7. Developing the strengths & potential of children & youth
  8. Supporting each other: encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other
  9. Treating each with respect and dignity

#8. Empowering Parents & Grandparents

**Twin Tasks**
1. Promoting the faith growth of parents
2. Developing the faith forming skills of parents

**Content**
- Theological and spiritual formation of parents
- Skills for parenting for faith growth
- Knowledge and skills for parenting
#8. Empowering Parents & Grandparents

**Guides for Developing Parent Programming**

1. Address diverse spiritual-religious identities of parents.
2. Have parents practice new skills with their own children during program sessions.
3. Give parents a plan for parenting.
   - Give them a plan for parenting proactively.
   - Show them how it works.
   - Tell them what to do today.
4. Address the levels of partnership with parents.
   - Aware
   - Involved
   - Engaged
   - Invested
5. Design programs that engage parents in the learning experience.
6. Use a variety of environments & methods to engage all parents.
7. Use online platforms and digitally enabled strategies.
#8. Empowering Parents & Grandparents

**Ideas for Parent Programming**

1. Parent website
2. Parent programs—a progression of workshops, webinars, and/or courses for each stage of the lifecycle
3. Laboratory experiences—immersion/hands-on experiences through church events or family/intergenerational programs
4. Parent mentors
5. Lifecycle support groups for parents
6. A parent catechumenate—around key milestone experiences and “moments of return”