



Envisioning the Future of Faith Formation 2020

► Imagine faith formation today in a church community. A variety of high-quality faith formation programs for grade-school children, youth, and adults are offered throughout the year. The children's program consists of weekly classes and occasional special activities and events. The youth program is a mix of confirmation classes, youth meetings, service projects, and special events and trips. Adult programs include courses on a variety of topics, seasonal presentations like a Lenten series, and small group Bible study. Family programs are offered several times a year to connect families with the celebration of the church year seasons. In the summer, children and their parents participate in a Vacation Bible School program, while young people are engaged in service projects and mission trips locally and across the country. Milestones and sacraments provide opportunities for faith formation at baptism, first communion, receiving the first Bible, and confirmation. For people interested in becoming Christian, there is a yearlong process of faith formation to prepare them for baptism and joining the church.

It is a huge undertaking for the church and their faith formation leaders to provide this level of faith formation programming. But is it enough? Even though the community is very positive and supportive of faith formation and the great work that is being done, there is a feeling among the leaders that something is missing. They wonder why teens leave the church after confirmation. Why are parents bringing their children to classes but not to worship on Sunday? Why do some families get

involved only when they are celebrating a milestone or sacrament? Why don't more adults participate in the adult faith formation programs? Where are all the people in their twenties and thirties? Why do parents have their child baptized and then never return to church again? How can we reach the new ethnic groups that are moving into our community? How can we reach those who have left the church?

The pastor, staff, and faith formation leaders see the changes occurring in their church, in their community, and in the world, and wonder what the future holds for them. If present trends continue what impact will they have on the future of the church? What will happen if the church doesn't respond to the challenges, if faith formation is not aligned well with the life situations and the spiritual needs of people today and in the future? The pastor, staff, and faith formation leaders feel that the pressing demands of the present preclude the possibility of imagining the future of faith formation in their church. Yet they must envision the future and design new initiatives to provide vibrant faith formation for all ages and generations if they are to thrive as a church community.

The Faith Formation 2020 Initiative was created to guide churches to envision and design dynamic, engaging, and inspiring faith formation in the second decade of the twenty-first century—to imagine the possibilities for faith formation in 2020. The last two decades have seen dramatic political, economic, social, and cultural changes affecting virtually every dimension of American Christianity. Churches across the United States are facing significant challenges in their efforts to provide vibrant faith formation for all ages and generations in the faith community. The new environment in which Christian faith formation will operate in the decade from 2010–2020 will demand new thinking and new models, practices, resources, and technologies to address the spiritual needs of all generations.

- *What could faith formation in Christian churches look like in 2020?*
- *Specifically, how can Christian congregations provide vibrant faith formation to address the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations over the next ten years?*
- *How can churches envision the shape of faith formation in the year 2020 and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in the second decade of the twenty-first century?*

The goal of the Faith Formation 2020 Initiative is to inspire creative action in the present through anticipation of possible futures. The four scenarios developed through the initiative are stories that address significant forces affecting faith formation and stimulate new ways of thinking about the present and the future. No one knows what lies just beyond the horizon but these four scenarios of the future can inform church leaders of potential challenges and opportunities they may want to

prepare for now rather than react to later. The four scenarios are not predictions, projections, or prophecies but rather an attempt to provoke a realization that the future need not simply be more of the same.

Scenario Thinking and the Future

To help church leaders envision the future of faith formation the Faith Formation 2020 Initiative employs a process called *scenario thinking*. Jay Ogilvy and Peter Schwartz of Global Business Network describe scenarios as “narratives of alternative environments in which today’s decisions may be played out. They are not predictions. Nor are they strategies. Instead they are more like hypotheses of different futures specifically designed to highlight the risks and opportunities involved in specific strategic issues.” The point is not to gather evidence for some “most probable” future. The point is rather to entertain a number of different possibilities in order to make better choices about the future of faith formation in the face of inevitable uncertainties.

Scenarios are created and used in sets of multiple stories that capture a range of possibilities, good and bad, expected and surprising. They are designed to stretch our thinking about emerging changes and the opportunities and threats that the future might hold. They allow us to weigh our choices more carefully when making short-term and long term strategic decisions. At their most basic, scenarios help people and organizations order and frame their thinking about the long term while providing them with the tools and confidence to take action soon. At their most powerful, scenarios help people and organizations find strength of purpose and strategic direction in the face of daunting, chaotic, and even frightening circumstances.

Over the last forty years, in the face of increasing uncertainty and complexity, corporations and organizations have begun to apply scenario processes to their work. A famous example occurred in South Africa in 1991, when the creation of the Mont Fleur scenarios catalyzed a nationwide discussion about the possibilities for post-Apartheid South Africa. These scenarios were developed as the political negotiations between the ANC and the apartheid-era National Party were taking place. The scenarios were presented as alternative outcomes to difficult decisions that the key stakeholders in South Africa would have to make (for example, about reconciliation versus revenge, about the role of private property, and about minority rights for whites). The dialogue that stemmed from these scenarios enabled the stakeholders to think through the implications of their decisions and consequently adjust their strategies.

The Smithsonian Institution engaged in scenario thinking when it decided to generate a new vision for the Institution and create a strategic plan that would help to decide how and where to allot its billion dollar annual budget over the

next decade (2010–2020). The focus question was: How might the Smithsonian best create and diffuse knowledge in the future? A core piece of the process was to understand what the future would require the Institution to become. During the scenario workshops in 2009, roughly one hundred participants worked together to explore the external forces—from economic and geopolitical influences to demographic and technological change—that might affect the Smithsonian in the near, mid, and long term. They then developed and refined four alternative scenarios for the future and considered what role the Smithsonian could best plan in each:

- **Citizen of the World:** a globalized future in which borders become more porous, the United States becomes more intertwined with other nations, and the global and transnational elements of the Smithsonian activities come to the fore
- **Global Prosperity:** a “bright future” scenario in which national economies recover and thrive, and the Smithsonian is free to develop new opportunities without major economic constraints
- **Global Challenges:** a world in which the Smithsonian plays a role in addressing big challenges facing the United States and the world, including climate change issues, the need to improve education, and threats to the planet’s cultural and national heritage
- **Most Respected Nation:** a world in which the Smithsonian embodies and represents what is best about the United States and grows its reputation as an institution that values and embodies knowledge, learning, and progress

One interesting realization that came out of the workshop was just how interconnected the future of the Smithsonian—steward of the United States’ material culture and history—is with the future of the United States itself. In each scenario, the Smithsonian becomes an expression of the changing American identity. Another key realization was the increased importance of digitizing the Institution’s collections and incorporating new interactive technologies into the museum experience in order to reach and attract broader audiences.

In recent years, scenario thinking has become one of the most popular strategy and long-term thinking tools, used by many of the world’s top companies, influential government agencies, and community organizations and foundations to make sense of and succeed in a turbulent, uncertain world.

Three principles underpin any successful scenario thinking approach. Applied to religious congregations, the three principles are:

1. **Take the Long View.** The day-to-day work of most churches is driven by near-term concerns and one- to three-year planning horizons. However, in reality, most strategic choices—from new projects to new leadership—are

choices that will play out a long way into the future. Taking the long view offers a more proactive and anticipatory approach to address the forces affecting church life; to see both challenges and opportunities more clearly; and to consider the long-term effects and potential unintended consequences of actions that a church might take.

2. **Think from the “Outside-in.”** Like other organizations, most churches are surprised by discontinuous events because they spend their time thinking about what they are most familiar with: their own congregation. They think from the inside—the things they can control—out to the world in which they operate. Conversely, thinking from the outside-in begins with pondering external social, technological, environmental, economic, religious, and political shifts—changes that might, over time, profoundly affect the community and church, creating new risks and opportunities in the process.
3. **Embrace Multiple Perspectives.** The introduction of multiple perspectives helps one better understand and challenge assumptions while painting an expansive picture of an issue or idea. The result is the broadening of a church’s peripheral vision; new threats and opportunities are seen that otherwise might have been missed.

Ultimately, the point of scenario thinking is to arrive at a deeper understanding of the world in which the church operates, and to continue to use that understanding to address the most critical challenges—from faith formation priorities, programming strategy, and innovation to visioning and leadership. In every context, scenario thinking improves upon the ability to make better decisions today and in the future.

Although scenario planning is a highly imaginative and interactive exercise, the process is systematic with five distinct phases. These phases are:

1. **Orient.** The goal of this phase is to clarify the issue at stake, and to use that issue as an orienting device throughout the remaining phases.
2. **Explore.** The second phase explores the many “driving forces” that could shape your focal question. Driving forces are the forces of change outside the organization or community that will shape future dynamics in predictable and unpredictable ways. They might include new technologies, political shifts, economic conditions, or social dynamics. Driving forces can be either “predetermined elements”—forces that are highly likely to develop in a direction that is known and unchangeable; or “uncertainties”—forces that are important, but unpredictable in terms of how they may play out.

3. **Synthesize.** The next phase involves combining the identified driving forces to create a scenario framework. Usually frameworks are constructed from two of the most important, or “critical” uncertainties. Once a framework is in place, the next step is to develop the scenarios into narratives—stories that begin in the present and end in the future.
4. **Act.** In this phase, scenarios are used to inform and inspire action. The test of a good set of scenarios is not whether in the end those scenarios portray the future accurately, but whether it enables an organization to learn, adapt, and take effective action. After creating the scenarios, the next step is to imagine deeply living and working in each one. Individuals and organizations should ask themselves: What if this scenario is the future? What actions would I take today to prepare? Are there actions I could take to catalyze a desirable future, or to mitigate a negative one? The answers to your questions are scenario implications. The patterns and insights that emerge from the implications—across all possible scenarios—can set the priorities that will help you make progress on your long-term goals.
5. **Monitor.** The last phase involves creating mechanisms that will help your organization track shifts in the environment and adjust strategy accordingly.

What are the benefits of scenario thinking and planning for envisioning the future?

- Using a methodological structure that focuses on what is not known, scenario planning achieves greater impact by anticipating alternate outcomes and managing resources accordingly.
- Scenario planning is a powerful tool precisely because the future is unpredictable and shaped by many interacting variables. Scenarios enable us to think creatively and rigorously about the different ways these forces may interact, while forcing us to challenge our own assumptions about what we believe or hope the future will be.
- Scenarios embrace and weave together multiple perspectives and provide us an ongoing framework for spotting and making sense of important changes as they emerge.
- Perhaps most importantly, scenarios give us a new, shared language that deepens our conversations about the future and how we can help to shape it.

Envisioning the Future of Faith Formation Using Scenario Thinking

No one can definitively map the future of Christian faith formation. However, developing alternate futures can contribute to good decision-making processes that will determine the direction of faith formation. The four faith formation scenarios presented in this book can help frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for a church and help a church's leadership prepare more effectively. The scenarios are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of faith formation in your church—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

The Focus of Faith Formation 2020 (Orient)

Every scenario project has a focal question—a broad yet strategic query that serves as an anchor for the scenarios. For the Faith Formation 2020 Initiative the focal question is: What could faith formation in Christian churches look like in 2020? Additionally, how can Christian congregations provide vibrant faith formation to address the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations over the next ten years? How can churches envision the shape of faith formation in the year 2020 and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

Eight Significant Driving Forces

Influencing Faith Formation 2020 (Explore)

What are the driving forces that will most directly impact the future of faith formation in Christian churches by 2020, and more specifically, the ability of congregations to provide vibrant faith formation over the next ten years? We cannot know what the future will hold beforehand. But we can see trends in the present, which, continuing on their current course, will have an impact on developing faith formation for 2020.

We know that Christian churches are confronted by a number of significant social, cultural, technological, and generational forces that make faith formation for all ages and generations quite challenging. There are driving forces that we can be reasonably certain will shape the worlds we are describing. These “predetermined elements” include the growing influence of Hispanic/Latino religious faith upon American Christianity, the rise of emerging adulthood—emerging adulthood, increasing numbers of adults sixty-five and older in American society, and increasing social, religious, and ethnic/cultural diversity in the United States. For example, it is a demographic certainty that there will be more adults over sixty-five years old in the United States population, and in churches, in 2020 than there are now.

Predetermined elements are important to any scenario story, but they are not the foundation on which these stories are built. Rather, scenarios are formed around “critical uncertainties”—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our focusing issue, the future of faith formation in Christian churches, and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution. Whereas predetermined elements are predictable driving forces, uncertainties are by their nature unpredictable: their outcome can be guessed at but not known. While any single uncertainty could challenge our thinking, the future will be shaped by multiple forces playing out over time. The scenario framework provides a structured way to consider how these critical uncertainties might unfold and evolve in combination.

By reviewing research studies, analyzing trends, and consulting with leaders, the Faith Formation 2020 Initiative selected eight significant forces—critical uncertainties whose future direction is not known, but that are already having significant impact on faith formation and will likely continue to do so over the next decade. (See Appendix 1 for research summaries of each driving force.) The eight significant forces include:

1. Declining Number of Christians and Growing Number of People with No Religious Affiliation. The population of the United States continues to show signs of becoming less religious: In 2008, 15–16% of Americans claimed no religious affiliation, nearly double the 1990 figure. Among Americans ages 18–29, one in four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion. The number of American adults identified as Christians dropped 10% from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008. Similar to the general American public, Latinos have become less identified with Christianity—down from 91% in 1990 to 82% in 2008. Latinos claiming no religious affiliation increased fourfold in number, from 900,000 or 6% of the population in 1990 to nearly four million or 12% in 2008. It appears that the challenge to Christianity in the United States does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion. This growing non-religious minority reduces the traditional societal role of congregations in family celebrations of life-cycle events. Forestalling of religious rites of passage, such as marriage and baptism, and the lowering expectations on religious funeral services, could have long lasting consequences for religious institutions.

2. Increasing Number of People Becoming More “Spiritual” and Less “Religious.” A small but growing minority of the United States population describe themselves as Spiritual but Not Religious (meaning not connected to organized religion): 9% of Americans were Spiritual but Not Religious in 1998, rising to 14% in 2008; and 18% of eighteen- to thirty-nine-year-olds say they are Spiritual but Not Religious, compared to only 11% a decade ago. If what people mean when they say they are Spiritual but Not Religious is that they are generally concerned with spiritual matters but are not interested in organized religion, then this trend indicates a growing minority

of the population whose spiritual inclinations do not lead them to become involved in churches, synagogues, or mosques. In our increasingly pluralistic society, to be “spiritual” is more likely to represent an eclectic spirituality, drawing not only from the various streams of Christianity, but including elements of other religious traditions.

3. Declining Participation in Christian Churches. By measure of participation such as worship attendance, marriages and baptisms in the church, and child and youth participation in faith formation programming, the trend is toward declining participation in church life in mainline Protestant and Catholic churches. Among young Hispanics, immigrants attend church services more regularly than do the native born (second and third generation). Combined with the trend toward fewer Christians and the growing numbers of religiously unaffiliated, it appears that succeeding generations of Christians are less likely to be exposed to formation in the Christian faith because worship attendance is down, and therefore participation in church life, education, and activities is likewise down. This means less exposure to the Christian tradition and teachings, reduced opportunities to experience the Christian way of life, and far less reinforcement of the Christian faith in church settings. The effect of these trends can be found in research on emerging adults (twenty- to thirty-year-olds): only 15% embrace a strong religious faith and another 30% believe and perform certain aspects of their religious traditions; at least 40% have no connection to a religious tradition (see *Souls in Transition*).

4. Increasing Diversity and Pluralism in American Society. American society reflects a growing diversity of ethnic cultures and nationalities and their traditions, customs, foods, and languages, and also a growing diversity of religious traditions from the East and the West. Pluralism creates both richness and tensions. We live next door to other nations; we’re engaged in conversation with people from all parts of the world, with customs and expectations vastly different from our own. We also live in a pluralistic society in which no single authority exercises supremacy and no single belief or ideology dominates. Christian culture is no longer at the center of American life; it has been replaced by a tapestry of religious and spiritual alternatives and choices. The range of religious practice and belief in American society today is enormous, and it is all around us. The increasing diversity and the pluralism of belief and practice undermines the plausibility and truth-claims of any single religious tradition. The diversity of religious choice and openness to everything religious results in people crisscrossing religious boundaries as they construct their own personal spiritualities. We have become a society of “spiritual tinkerers” (Robert Wuthnow), which makes developing and sustaining a Christian identity and religious commitments exceedingly difficult.

5. Increasing Influence of Individualism on Christian Identity and Community Life. The influence of individualism means that religious identity is more autonomous and deliberate today and that religion is less anchored in a sense of

belonging. There is a decline in connectedness; a weakening or severing of the *social* basis of religion in family, marriage, ethnicity, and community; a decline in the perceived necessity of communal or institutional structures as constituent of religious identity. Religious identity today is not only less bounded by doctrine or creed; it is also less nurtured and reinforced by community. Significant numbers of Americans see little necessary connection between being spiritual and being part of a historic tradition, or part of a disciplined community of faith. This is reinforced by the mass media's not so subtle message that you don't need a religious community to engage "God issues." Nominal membership increasingly replaces active involvement, a development paralleling national civic trends. Religion is perceived less as an inherited phenomenon, or as a binding community of discipleship and obligation. Religious leaders and institutions, which traditionally provided the framework within which religious meaning was constructed, have become increasingly peripheral to the spirituality and "lived religion" of private personal enterprise.

6. Changing Patterns of Marriage and Family Life. It appears that one of the reasons for the decline in church participation is that younger Americans are marrying later, having fewer children, and having them later—all of which means that far more younger Americans are single and childless than was true a generation ago and that the same younger Americans are not settling into religious congregations at the same rate as their parents did in the 1970s. Religious practice is especially influenced by marrying, settling down, and having children and raising them. Since individuals who marry are more likely to attend religious services than are those who delay marriage, the postponement of marriage and childbearing has contributed to the decline in church attendance. Also, there has been a dramatic increase in religiously mixed marriages and partnerships: more than one in four (27%) American adults who are married or living with a partner are in religiously mixed relationships. If people from different Protestant denominational families are included, for example a marriage between a Methodist and a Lutheran, nearly four in ten (37%) marriages are religiously mixed.

7. Declining Family Religious Socialization. Family religious socialization has always been the foundation for the development of faith and faith practices in children, and for participation in church life and worship. As Christian Smith observes, "teenagers with seriously religious parents are more likely than those without such parents to have been trained in their lives to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that training "sticks" with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood. Emerging adults who grew up with seriously religious parents are through socialization more likely (1) to have internalized their parents' religious worldview, (2) to possess the practical religious know-how needed to live more highly religious lives, and (3) to embody the identity orientations and

behavioral tendencies toward continuing to practice what they have been taught religiously” (Smith, 232). 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, but especially among Catholic and Mainline traditions. Religious practice among the next generation of parents (young adults in their twenties and thirties) is especially influenced by marrying, settling down, having children and raising them. Since individuals who marry are more likely to attend religious services than are those who delay marriage, the postponement of marriage and childbearing has contributed to the decline in church attendance. Complicating this picture, is the fact that an ever growing percentage of Christians (at least 30%) are not getting married in a religious ceremony. The less contact that young adults have with the Christian tradition through participation in a local church, the less family religious socialization that is likely to take place when they marry and have children.

8. Increasing Impact of Digital Media and Web Technologies. Technology and digital media are transforming the ways we live. Globalization and pluralism are driven by this unprecedented technological change. People meet on Facebook and share their inspirations on YouTube all the while Tweeting to an assortment of friends. Groups of people at opposite ends of a continent or around the globe don’t need to leave their own contexts in order to meet in real time and in video, on Skype or some webinar format. Social connectivity is being leveraged globally online. People’s use of the internet’s capabilities for communication—for creating, cultivating, and continuing social relationships—is undeniable. However, time spent online often takes time away from important face-to-face relationships. As of 2010, virtually all of those twenty-nine and younger in the United States today are online, as are 93% of teens (12–17) and young adults (18–29), 81% of adults thirty to forty-nine years old, 70% of adults fifty to sixty-four years old, and 38% of adults sixty-five and over. Increasingly people are accessing the internet on smart phones like the iPhone to send or receive text messages, take a picture, play a game, check email, record video, instant message, play music, get maps or directions, or record and watch video. Media are among the most powerful forces in young people’s lives today. Eight- to eighteen-year-olds spend more time with media than in any other activity besides (maybe) sleeping—an average of more than seven hours a day, seven days a week. The television shows they watch, video games they play, songs they listen to, books they read, and websites they visit are an enormous part of their lives, offering a constant stream of messages about families, peers, relationships, gender roles, sex, violence, food, values, clothes, and an abundance of other topics too long to list. How will these new digital technologies transform our lives and our religious identities? What will be the impact of this technological revolution on faith formation and Christian congregations?

Two Critical Uncertainties for Faith Formation 2020 (Synthesize)

After careful study of the significant driving forces, two uncertainties were selected from a longer list of potential uncertainties that might shape the broader context of church and faith formation over the next decade and longer. The framework for the final set of scenarios is a matrix with two axes that represent the two critical uncertainties in the external environment that will affect the future of faith formation from 2010–2020. The two chosen uncertainties, introduced below, together define a set of four scenarios for the future of faith formation in churches that are divergent, challenging, internally consistent, and plausible. Each of the two uncertainties is expressed as an axis that represents a continuum of possibilities ranging between two endpoints.

Relationship with Organized Religion and Christianity

RESISTANT ←————→ **RECEPTIVE**

Will trends in American culture lead people to become more receptive to organized religion, and in particular Christianity, over the next decade or will trends lead people to become more resistant to organized religion and Christianity?

Hunger for and Openness to God and the Spiritual Life

DECREASE ←————→ **INCREASE**

Will people's hunger for and openness to God and the spiritual life increase over the next decade or will people's hunger for and openness to God and the spiritual life decrease?

The “future of faith formation 2020 framework” was developed because the combination of *receptivity* to organized religion and Christianity, and *openness* or *hunger* for God and the spiritual life seemed to best express the American population’s contemporary experience today and over the next decade.

Relationship with Organized Religion and Christianity

This uncertainty refers to the social and cultural trends regarding people’s attitudes and responses to organized religion, and in particular Christianity, in the United States. Will people be more or less receptive to Christianity and involved in churches in the next decade? Several of the eight significant forces describe the current trajectory of this uncertainty: declining numbers of Christians; growing numbers of people with no religious affiliation; increasing numbers of people becoming more “spiritual” and less “religious;” declining participation in Christian churches; increasing influence of individualism on Christian identity and community life; changing patterns of marriage and family life, especially delaying marriage and having children later; and declining family religious socialization. Will these trends continue and, if they do, what will be the impact on Christian churches and faith formation? How will churches respond to this uncertainty over the next decade?

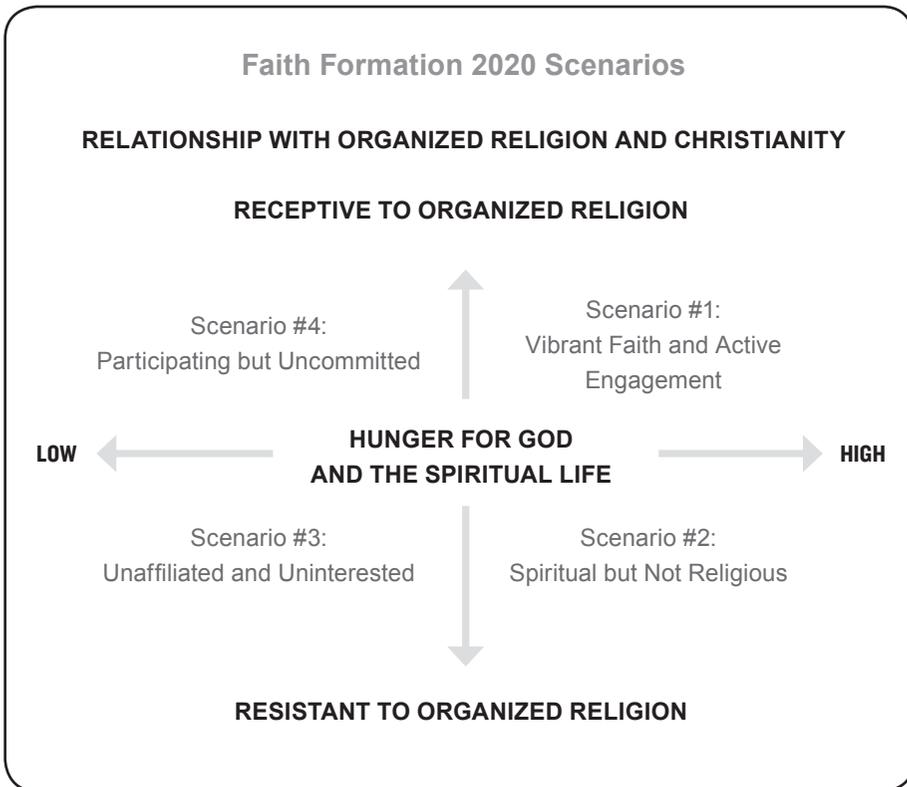
Hunger for and Openness to God and the Spiritual Life

This uncertainty refers to the importance of God and the spiritual life in the lives of people today. Will people’s hunger and openness increase or decrease over the next decade? Several of the eight significant forces describe the current trajectory of this uncertainty: declining numbers of Christians; increasing number of people becoming more “spiritual” and less “religious;” declining participation in Christian churches; increasing diversity and pluralism in American society resulting in a tapestry of religious and spiritual alternatives and choices; increasing influence of individualism on Christian identity and community life resulting in “spiritual tinkering” and more individualized spirituality; declining family religious socialization; and utilizing the digital media and technological tools to access a diversity of spiritual traditions and resources, and to participate in online communities of support and spiritual growth. Will these trends continue and, if they do, what will be the impact on Christian churches and faith formation? How will churches respond to this uncertainty over the next decade?

Four Scenarios for Faith Formation 2020 (Synthesize)

When the two critical uncertainties are connected in a 2x2 matrix, a set of four stories—or scenarios—are created to describe how the future of faith formation in 2020 could evolve. This matrix represents a map of today and a projected future reality. That is, each of the four quadrants of this map represents a dynamic story that is based on a different future outcome of the two critical uncertainties.

Which of the scenarios will become dominant over the next decade? Where are people in our churches and culture moving? What will be the response of Christian churches to the four scenarios?



The scenarios express a range of possible futures facing congregational faith formation over the decade from 2010 to 2020. Each scenario story explains why the “main story” of faith formation in 2020 will be framed by the response of Christian churches to people’s relationship—their attitudes and responses—to organized religion (receptive or resistant) and to people’s hunger for and openness to God and the spiritual life (high or low).

The scenarios that follow are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive—rather they are designed to be both plausible and challenging, to engage your imagination while also raising new questions about what the future of faith formation might look and feel like. *Imagine what faith formation could look and feel like in your congregation if your church is responding to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario. Imagine the life of your congregation in 2020 if faith formation addresses the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations in each scenario over the next ten years.*

Scenario #1. Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first scenario describes a world in which people of all ages and generations are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. People have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for all ages and generations to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, at home and at church, that develops vibrant faith, is continuous throughout life, and engages all people in the life and mission of the church community.

Scenario #2. Spiritual but Not Religious

The second scenario describes a world in which people 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 the eighteen- to thirty-nine-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to engage people where they live (physical and virtual communities), build relationships, engage in spiritual conversations, and offer programs and activities that nurture their spiritual growth.

Scenario #3. Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The third scenario describes a world in which people 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 the eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds. 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.

Scenario #4. Participating but Uncommitted

The fourth scenario describes a world in which people 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. 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.

Apply the Four Scenarios to Your Church

Use the following questions to explore how each scenario applies in your church community.

- Who are the people in your community in this scenario? How would you describe them?
- What are the religious and spiritual needs of people in this scenario? How would you describe one or two aspects of their religious and spiritual hopes or desires?
- How is your church addressing the spiritual and religious needs of people in this scenario through faith formation today?

The Impact of the Four Scenarios for Churches (Act)

Each scenario story explains why the “main story” of faith formation in 2020 will be framed by the response of churches to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario. While the questions that follow are only illustrative of the challenges and opportunities the scenarios present, they help to frame questions that churches need to ask about the impact of the four scenarios upon their congregation and its faith formation. Develop your own questions by studying the eight driving forces and how they apply to your church (see Appendix 1), and by exploring the implications of the four scenarios for your congregation. Use the following questions as a guide to begin your study of the impact—challenges and opportunities—of the four scenarios upon your church community.

Scenario #1. Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

- Will churches develop continuous faith formation for all ages and generations, especially for adults (twenties-nineties), faith formation that engages people—mind, body, heart, and spirit—in a diversity of ways to grow in faith for a lifetime?
- Will churches strengthen family socialization by equipping parents and families to become centers of faith formation and practice?
- Will churches become “sticky”—keeping all ages involved in faith formation through a diversity of programs, activities, and resources at home and church that address their life situations and religious and spiritual needs?

- Will churches embrace the tremendous potential of digital media and web technologies to provide faith formation and engage people in lifelong faith growth 24/7/365?
- Will churches empower people of vibrant faith with the knowledge, faith sharing skills, and confidence to share their faith with those who are not involved in a church community or spiritually committed?

Scenario #2. Spiritual but Not Religious

- Will churches invest the time and resources to develop specialized faith formation around the life situations and spiritual needs of the Spiritual but Not Religious who are in their twenties and thirties?
- Will churches provide faith formation programming for spiritual seekers that is conducted in “Third Place” settings outside of the church facilities?
- Will churches see the potential in marriage and baptism for faith formation and the potential (re)engagement in church life for the “Spiritual but Not Religious?”
- Will churches provide a guided process and program for spiritually hungry people to investigate the Christian faith and join in small communities with other seekers for spiritual growth and support?

Scenario #3. Unaffiliated and Uninterested

- Will churches establish a “Third Place” gathering site as a platform for reaching the Unaffiliated and Uninterested through a variety of spiritual and/or life-centered programs, conversations, and activities?
- Will churches develop a “web-presence” that is inviting and attractive to the Unaffiliated and Uninterested so that they can investigate and experience the Christian faith online?
- Will churches sponsor programs, such as service projects and mission trips, that are designed so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action?

Scenario #4. Participating but Uncommitted

- Will churches begin with the birth and baptism of children to strengthen family socialization by equipping parents and families to become centers of faith formation and practice?
- Will churches develop pathways for spiritual commitment and more active engagement by offering a formation process that helps people develop and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ, explore the foundational teachings of the Christian faith, and live the fundamental Christian practices?
- Will churches utilize digital media and web technologies to extend faith formation—resources, social networking, faith practices—into the daily lives of people who only participate occasionally?

- Will churches use the occasions of participation, such as sacraments and milestones, to provide faith formation that involves the whole family and invites them into more active engagement in the church community?

Assess the Impact of the Four Scenarios on Your Church

Use the following questions to explore the impact of each scenario on your church community.

- What are the *challenges* that this scenario presents for the future of faith formation in your church community?
- What are the *opportunities* that this scenario presents for the future of faith formation in your church community?
- What are the *implications* of *not* addressing the future of faith formation in this scenario?
- What are the *implications* of addressing the future of faith formation in this scenario?

Strategies for Bringing the Four Faith Formation Scenarios to Life (Act)

Part Four in this book presents sixteen strategies with practical ideas and resources for addressing the challenges and opportunities in each scenario over the next ten years. The sixteen strategies are not just “good ideas.” Each one is grounded in practices that are already being implemented in one form or another in congregations and religious organizations today. The good news is that there are proven strategies, ideas, and resources that can bring the four scenarios to life in a congregation.

The sixteen strategies are offered as a starting point for designing the future of faith formation in each scenario. They are not intended as a definitive list, but as a helpful guide. Many of the strategies can be customized for use in multiple scenarios. Every church can learn from the experience of these strategies and innovations, and adapt them to the size, geography, people, and cultures of a particular church.

Faith Formation 2020 Strategies

1. Faith Formation through the Life of the Whole Church (Scenarios 1 and 4)
2. Faith Formation using Digital Media and Web Technologies (All Scenarios)
3. Family Faith Formation (Scenarios 1, 2, and 4)
4. Intergenerational Faith Formation (Scenarios 1 and 4)

5. Generational Faith Formation (Scenarios 1, 2, and 4)
 - Faith formation with the iGeneration and Millennial Generation
 - Faith formation with Generation X
 - Faith formation with the Baby Boomer Generation
 - Faith formation with the Builder Generation
6. Milestones Faith Formation (All Scenarios)
7. Faith Formation in Christian Practices (All Scenarios)
8. Transforming the World: Engagement in and Formation for Service and Mission (All Scenarios)
9. Spiritual Formation (All Scenarios)
10. Multi-Ethnic Faith Formation (All Scenarios)
11. Faith Formation for Spiritual Seekers (Scenario 2)
12. Apprenticeships in Discipleship (Scenarios 2 and 4)
13. Pathways to Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement (Scenario 2 and 4)
14. Faith Formation in Third Place Settings (Scenarios 2 and 3)
15. Empowering the Community to Share their Faith (Scenario 1)
16. Interfaith Education and Dialogue (Scenario 1)

In chapter 2 we turn our attention to designing a comprehensive plan for Faith Formation 2020 in your church that builds on current faith formation efforts and utilizes the four scenarios and the sixteen strategies to plan for the future.

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Faith Formation 2020 Scenarios

Relationship with Organized Religion and Christianity

Receptive to Organized Religion

Scenario #4

Participating but Uncommitted

The fourth scenario describes a world in which people 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. 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.

Scenario #1

Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement

The first scenario describes a world in which people of all ages and generations are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and are growing in their faith. People have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for all ages and generations to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. Congregations are challenged to provide lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, at home and at church, that develops vibrant faith, is continuous throughout life, and engages all people in the life and mission of the church community.

LOW

← Hunger for God and the Spiritual Life →

HIGH

Scenario #3

Unaffiliated and Uninterested

The third scenario describes a world in which people 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 the 18-29-year-olds. 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.

Scenario #2

Spiritual but Not Religious

The second scenario describes a world in which people are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but mostly likely not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a non-denominational 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 the 18-39-year-olds. Congregations are challenged to engage people where they live (physical and virtual communities), build relationships, engage in spiritual conversations, and offer programs and activities that nourish their spiritual growth.

Resistant to Organized Religion