



Summary Report from the Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium

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Sponsored by LifelongFaith Associates

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From October 1-3, 2015 over 100 faith formation leaders from across the U.S. and Canada gathered in Connecticut to explore the future of adult faith formation at a symposium convened by LifelongFaith Associates. The participants were guided through a scenario planning process to create four scenarios for the future of adult faith formation in congregations and to design strategies for using the scenarios to design new initiatives and projects in adult faith formation.

This **Summary** introduces the four scenarios and strategies for using the scenarios in designing adult faith formation in congregations, designing programs and resources, conducting workshops, and training leaders for adult faith formation.

For the complete **Guide to Envisioning the Future of Adult Faith Formation** with more resources and tools go to the Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website: www.seasonsofadultfaith.com/future.html.



LifelongFaith Associates

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What could adult faith formation look like in the twenty-first century? What insights and practices should inform and guide the development of adult faith formation for the four stages of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults? How do we engage all the seasons of an adult’s life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today’s world. How can we reach *every* adult in our faith communities and in the wider community?

The **2015 National Symposium on the Future of Adult Faith** engaged over 100 Christian faith formation leaders in analyzing the forces affecting the lives of adults and faith communities today, envisioning potential *futures* for adult faith based on current realities and future possibilities, and develop strategies for more faith communities toward more effective and comprehensive adult faith formation.

The Symposium addressed three central questions:

What could adult faith formation in faith communities look like in five years (2016-2020)?

How can faith communities provide vibrant faith formation to address the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults—over the next five years?

How can congregations envision the future shape of adult faith formation and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in faith formation with adults?

The Adult Faith Formation Symposium utilize a scenario planning process to create four scenarios for envisioning the future of adult faith formation. The four scenarios are stories that address significant forces affecting adult faith formation and stimulate new ways of thinking about the present and the future. The four adult faith formation scenarios frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for congregations—as well as denominations—and help leaders prepare more effectively. 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. They are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

Part 1. Introducing Scenario Planning

The participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* envisioned the future of adult faith formation using 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 its 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 its most powerful, scenarios help people and

organizations find strength of purpose and strategic direction in the face of daunting, chaotic and even frightening circumstances.

No one can definitively map the future of adult faith formation in congregations. However, developing alternate futures can contribute to good decision-making processes that will determine the direction of faith formation. The four adult faith formation scenarios can help frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for congregations – as well as denominations – and help leaders prepare more effectively. The scenarios are meant to stimulate discussion about what choices leaders can make today in order to thrive in the future. The scenarios are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

Part 2. The Focusing Question

Every scenario project has a focal question—a broad yet strategic query that serves as an anchor for the scenarios. For the adult faith formation scenario planning process, the focal questions are:

What could adult faith formation in faith communities look like in five years (2016-2020)?

How can faith communities provide vibrant faith formation to address the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults—over the next five years?

How can congregations envision the future shape of adult faith formation and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in faith formation with adults?

The goal of the adult faith formation scenario project is to inspire creative action in the present through anticipation of possible futures. The four scenarios 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.

Part 3. Driving Forces

What are the driving forces that will most directly impact the future of adult faith formation in faith communities over the next five years (2016-2020), and more specifically, the ability of faith communities to provide vibrant adult faith formation over the next five years?

We know that faith communities are confronted by a number of significant social, cultural, technological, and generational forces that make faith formation for adults of all ages and generations quite challenging. There are driving forces that we can be reasonably certain will shape the worlds we are describing—these are *predetermined elements* such as the increase in adults over 60 years old and the fact that 10,000 Americans turn 65 years old each day—and that will continue for the next decade.

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 question 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.

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* identified driving forces that were “global”—affecting all adults in society, and driving forces that were specific to the four seasons of adults—young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s, and older adults (75+). The analysis at the Symposium reflects research studies and trends that are having a significant impact on the future direction of adult faith formation through 2020.

Part 4. Critical Uncertainties

A number of *critical uncertainties*—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our focusing question and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution—were identified by the Symposium participants. Six potential uncertainties were selected by the Symposium participants. Each uncertainty is expressed as a continuum of responses. The first set of three focused on the changing world in which adults live today; the second set on the hungers and interests of adults for the spiritual and religious.

The Response of Faith Communities to the Changing World of Adults

1. The response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society (ethnic, households/families, gender, and more)
faith communities resisting diversity -----faith communities embracing diversity
2. The response of faith communities to the busy, stressed, time-crunched, overwhelmed lives of adults today
faith communities responding with a “business as usual” approach to changing adult lives -----faith communities responding with with innovative approaches to changing adult lives
3. The response of faith communities to a “Design Your Own Life” culture
faith communities responding with “one-size-fits-all” adult faith formation -----faith communities responding with “one-size-fits one” personalized and customized adult faith formation

The Hungers and Interests of Adults for the Spiritual and Religious

1. The desire and interest among adults today in developing their spiritual life
decreasing desire and interest-----increasing desire and interest
2. The openness of adults today to belonging and participating in a faith community
decreasing openness-----increasing openness
3. The hunger and interest of adults today in being engaged in adult faith formation experiences in a faith community
decreasing interest -----increasing interest

After careful consideration two uncertainties were selected from the set of six—one from each category to form a matrix with two axes that represent the two critical uncertainties that will affect the future of adult faith formation from 2016-2020. The two chosen uncertainties, introduced below,

together define a set of four scenarios for the future of adult 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.

Uncertainty #1

The response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society
 (economic, ethnic/cultural, households/families, sexual/gender, spiritual, religious)
faith communities resisting diversity -----faith communities embracing diversity

Uncertainty #2

The desire and interest of adults today in developing their spiritual life
decreasing desire and interest-----increasing desire and interest

Part 5. Four Scenarios for the Future of Adult Faith Formation

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 adult faith formation could evolve. The scenarios express a range of possible futures and explain why the “main story” of adult faith formation will be framed by the response to these two significant uncertainties. The scenarios are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive—rather they are designed to be both plausible and challenging, to engage the imagination while also raising new questions about what the future of adult faith formation might look and feel like.

The Future of Adult Formation Scenario Matrix



No one can definitively map the future. We do not know which of the scenarios will rise in ascendancy over the next five years. *Will adults desire and interest in growing spiritually increase or decrease over the next five years? Will faith communities move toward embracing or resisting the increasing diversity in society and the adult population?*

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* described the “world” of each scenario by describing what’s happening in the lives of young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older

adults with special attention to their *desire and interest in growing spiritually* and what's happening in the lives of the faith communities with special attention to how *faith communities are embracing or resisting the increasing diversity in society and the adult population*.

Scenario 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually.

Characteristics of Scenario 1

- ✓ This is a vibrant and inclusive faith community where everyone is welcomed and encouraged to belong, and where people experience hospitality, acceptance, and love.
- ✓ This is a faith community which honors and celebrates cultural diversity, and where cultural expression is abundant in all aspects of church life.
- ✓ This is a faith community that provides opportunities for learning, faith growth, and worship in languages of the people of the community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that address the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community that offers a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to engage adults—in every season of adulthood—in growing spiritually, learning about the Bible and their religious tradition, serving the needs of others and working for justice, developing spiritual practices and disciplines, and much more. And all of this is customized around the interests, needs, and busy schedules and commitments of today's adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community that utilizes online environments and digital tools to connect with and engage adults in spiritual and religious growth.
- ✓ This is a faith community that guides adults in identifying their gifts and strengths and utilizing them in ministry within the faith community and in mission to the world.
- ✓ This is a faith community that promotes adult discipleship and deepens adult's relationship with Jesus through a variety of experiences and encounters, and that guides adults in living their faith in daily life.
- ✓ This is a faith community that incorporates adults fully into the intergenerational life of the community—developing relationships across generations, providing opportunities for mentoring younger generations, engaging them in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is engaging adults in transforming the world—serving the needs of the poor and vulnerable, working for social justice, addressing racism and prejudice, and caring for creation.
- ✓ This is a faith community that helps adults manage and grow through the kinds of transitions, milestones, developmental tasks, and changes in personal meaning that mark the journey of adulthood; and that brings a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing.
- ✓ This is a faith community that engages in missional outreach to adults who are spiritually open but not engaged in the faith community by expanding and extending the church's presence through connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live; and providing pathways for adults to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive community.

Scenario 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Characteristics of Scenario 2

- ✓ This is a faith community that is not developing responsive approaches, strategies, and programming that address the diverse adult population and engage adults in growing spiritually.
- ✓ This is a faith community that may not have the staffing and/or resources to respond effectively to the diverse life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults.
- ✓ This is faith community that is finding it difficult to understand and accept the social, cultural, economic, and religious changes that have produced a more diverse population of adults.
- ✓ This is faith community whose adult members are (or have been) primarily from one cultural or economic group, but now finds itself struggling to adapt to changes in the lives of adults and in the adult population in their surrounding neighborhood/community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that sees their mission in faith formation to serve only the adult members who are active in their faith community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is struggling to create an inclusive community where all adults are welcomed and encouraged to belong, and where people experience hospitality, acceptance, and love.
- ✓ This is a faith community with declining numbers of adults engaged in the life of the community, especially young adults, and an increasing number of adults who are participating occasionally in the life of the faith community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is not engaged in missional outreach and relationship building with adults in their everyday lives.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is most often resistant to any type of change or transformation, preferring to rely on the “tried and true” ways, even if they are not working any longer.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults are finding opportunities for spiritual growth, service to others, Scripture enrichment, and more in venues outside the faith community—such as in online communities and resource centers, house churches, movements, social justice organizations and more.

Scenario 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches. In light of this many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Characteristics of Scenario 3

- ✓ This is a world in which adults lead busy lives filled with work, family, sports/leisure, and other activities, and find little need for faith or spirituality or involvement in a faith community.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have a sense that they are self-sufficient and that there is no room in their life for faith or spirituality.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have had negative experiences of church life—many feel rejected because of their lifestyle, others experience a lack of welcoming and hospitality, while still others feel churches are too legalistic or judgmental.
- ✓ This is a faith community that does not understand and accept the social, cultural, economic, and religious changes that have produced a more diverse population of adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community that may not have the staffing and/or resources to respond effectively to the diverse life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults.
- ✓ This is a faith community with declining numbers of adults engaged in the life of the community, especially young adults, and an increasing number of adults who are participating occasionally in the life of the faith community.
- ✓ This is a faith community whose adult members are (or have been) primarily from one cultural or economic group, but now finds itself struggling to adapt to changes in the lives of adults and in the adult population in their surrounding neighborhood/community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is not engaged in missional outreach and relationship building with adults in the wider community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is most often resistant to any type of change or transformation, preferring to rely on the “tried and true” ways, even if they are not working any longer.

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

Characteristics of Scenario 4

- ✓ This is a world in which adults lead busy lives filled with work, family, sports/leisure, and other activities, and find little need for faith or spirituality or involvement in a faith community.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have a sense that they are self-sufficient and that there is no room in their life for faith or spirituality.
- ✓ This is a world in which adults have had negative experiences of church life—many feel rejected because of their lifestyle, others experience a lack of welcoming and hospitality, while still others feel churches are too legalistic or judgmental.
- ✓ This is a vibrant and inclusive faith community where everyone is welcomed and encouraged to belong, and where people experience hospitality, acceptance, and love.
- ✓ This is a faith community that engages in missional outreach to adults who are uninterested and unaffiliated by making connections in person and online, building relationships, and engaging with adults in hospitable environments for conversation.
- ✓ This is a faith community providing pathways for adults to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is equipping adults who are growing in their faith and active in the community to connect with adults who are uninterested and uninvolved.

- ✓ This is a faith community that is offering an array of life-centered programs and activities for each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, older adults—in a variety of venues.
- ✓ This is a faith community which honors and celebrates cultural diversity, and where cultural expression is abundant in all aspects of church life.
- ✓ This is a faith community that provides opportunities for learning, faith growth, and worship in the languages of the people of the community.
- ✓ This is a faith community that is engaging adults in the wider community in transforming the world—serving the needs of the poor and vulnerable, working for social justice, addressing racism and prejudice, and caring for creation.
- ✓ This is a faith community that helps adults manage and grow through the kinds of transitions, milestones, developmental tasks, and changes in personal meaning that mark the journey of adulthood; and that brings a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing.
- ✓ This is a faith community which partners with other churches, synagogues, and mosques to learn how to live in a more diverse world and to serve the needs of all adults in the community.

Part 6. Strategies for Creatively Responding to the Four Adult Faith Formation Scenarios

How can the four scenarios inform and inspire action in faith communities? What could it look like to live and work in each scenario? What actions can a faith community take today to create a desirable future or to mitigate a negative one? The answers to these questions are scenario strategies. The patterns and insights that emerge from the implications can form the building blocks of a strategic agenda for the future of adult faith formation. The following strategies are offered as a starting point for envisioning how a faith community can respond to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario. These ideas can serve as a basis for planning new initiatives to respond proactively and innovatively to the four scenarios. For more programming ideas, consult the following resources:

The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. Edited by John Roberto. Authors: Ed Gordon, Dorothy Linthicum, Jim Merhaut, Kyle Oliver, Mary Ann Ronan, Janet Schaeffler, and Tom Zanzig. Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith, 2015.

1. Faith Formation for All the Seasons of Adulthood—John Roberto
 2. The Development of Modern Adult Education and Faith Formation—Ed Gordon
 3. Young Adulthood—Kyle Oliver
 4. Midlife Adulthood—Jim Merhaut
 5. Mature Adulthood—Janet Schaeffler
 6. Older Adulthood—Dorothy Linthicum
 7. Spiritual Transformation for Adult Faith Formation—Tom Zanzig
 8. Developing Adult Faith Formation Programming—John Roberto
 9. Designing Twenty-First Century Adult Faith Formation—John Roberto
- (Order from www.LifelongFaith.com)

Lifelong Faith Journal, Fall 2015 Special Issue: Practices & Approaches for the Seasons of Adult Faith Formation. Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith, 2015.

- Faith Formation with Young Adults - Kyle Oliver
 - Faith Formation with Midlife Adults - Jim Merhaut
 - Faith Formation with Mature Adults - Janet Schaeffler
 - Faith Formation with Older Adults - Dorothy Linthicum
- (Online at www.LifelongFaith.com)

Adult Faith Formation Resources Online:

- Lifelong Faith: www.LifelongFaith.com
- Seasons of Adult Faith: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com
- Faith Formation Matters & GEMS Newsletter: www.janetschaeffler.com
- Faith Formation Learning Exchange (see Adults in “Research” and “Practices & Approaches”): www.FaithFormationLearningExchange.net

1. Designing Adult Faith Formation using the Scenarios

Here is a simple process developing targeted programming for the four scenarios. There is a detailed adult faith formation planning guide in Chapter 9 in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* that can provide assistance in moving from ideas to programs to implementation.

1. Identify which scenario or scenarios best describes your congregation. For example, your congregation may *embrace the diversity of adults* (Scenarios 1 and 4) and have adults who have a desire and interest in growing spiritually and adults who have little interest and desire. Your congregation may be unwilling to embrace the diversity of adults and you find that most adults do not have an interest or desire for spiritual growth (Scenario 3).
2. Develop a profile of your current adult faith formation programming for the scenarios you have selected. List the current activities in the appropriate scenario; some activities may be listed multiple times. Answer the question: *Ways we are currently addressing this scenario in our faith community.*
3. After completing the profile, analyze how your faith community is addressing the needs of the adults and the situation of the faith community in the scenarios you have identified. Use questions such as:
 - How effectively are we responding to the challenges and opportunities of the scenario(s)?
 - Viewed through lens of the scenario(s), what are our strengths?
 - Viewed through the lens of the scenario(s), what are the areas in need of improvement or growth?
 - What have we learned about our ministries and/or programming when viewed through the lens of the scenario(s)?
4. Based on your analysis, identify *the most important* areas for growth, development, improvement, and/or enhancement. The areas for development can be actions that you can take to **catalyze a desirable future**, or to **mitigate a negative one** in a particular scenario. Then decide on which areas are of the highest priority to pursue in the short term (a year) or long term (2-3 years).
5. Generate a variety of ideas for addressing each growth area. Use this Guide as a resource for ideas and strategies. Ideas suggested under one scenario can be applied to other scenarios with adaptation.
6. Select the best ideas to develop into new initiatives. Consider piloting the new initiatives with a small group of your target audience, making revisions, and then offering the new project to a wider audience. Through this piloting process, you can test the initiative and the implementation plan, get feedback from your target audience, improve the initiative, and then develop plans to reach a wider audience.

2. Three Essential Practices for 21st Century Adult Faith Formation

The following three practices are essential starting points for developing a comprehensive approach to 21st century adult faith formation that can address the situations presented in the four adult faith formation scenarios..

Practice 1. Variety of Faith Formation Programming

Adult faith formation provides a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Adult faith formation incorporates seven learning environments—independent, mentoring, at home, small groups, large groups, congregation-wide, and community/world—in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints.

Practice 2. A Network of Faith Formation

Adult faith formation is developed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces—that can offer adults “playlists” with a wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences tailored to their needs and interests—all offered on a digital platform that makes it easy for adults to find and follow pathways for growth in faith.

Practice 3. Online and Digitally Enabled Faith Formation

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

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

- Consult the complete **Guide to Envisioning the Future of Adult Faith Formation** for a complete description of these practices: www.seasonsofadultfaith.com/future.html.
- Consult Chapters 1 and 8 in *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* For more information on strategies and designing adult faith formation.

3. Strategies for the Adult Formation Scenarios

The scenarios are meant to stimulate discussion about what choices faith communities can make today in order to thrive over the next five years. The scenarios are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

Imagine what adult faith formation could look and feel like in your faith community if you are responding to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario.

Imagine the life of your faith community in 2020 if adult faith formation addresses these four scenarios.

Imagine what could happen in the lives of adults in your faith community and wider community if you are develop strategies, approaches, and programming that engages a diversity of adults in personal, spiritual, and religious growth.

Participants at the *Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium* generated dozens of ideas for addressing the particular needs and situation of each scenario. You can download this list of ideas from www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com. Go to the “Future” menu all of the Symposium documents.

This section provides a limited number of “core” strategies, developed from the Symposium ideas, for designing new initiatives in adult faith formation tailored to the specifics of each of the four scenarios. Each strategy needs to be designed around the particular life tasks and spiritual/religious needs of the four seasons of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

You will find that several strategies are found in more than one scenario. This happens because a strategy can be adapted to fit the needs and situation of multiple scenarios. This often involves refocusing where or how a strategy is implemented. This means that developing one strategy—in different versions—can address the needs of adults in two or more scenarios.

- Consult the complete **Guide to Envisioning the Future of Adult Faith Formation** for more ideas to use in designing programming: www.seasonsofadultfaith.com/future.html.
- For models, approaches, and programming ideas for each season of adulthood go to: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.
- For adult programming for the four seasons of adulthood download *Practices & Approaches for the Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*: www.LifelongFaith.com.
- For examples of missional programming: www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/missional.html.
- For intergenerational programming, case studies, and resources: www.intergenerationalfaith.com.

Scenario 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Interested Adults & Diversity-Embracing Communities

Emphasis: Offering a great variety of faith formation experiences for each season of adulthood in physical and online spaces for adults who want to grow in faith within a supportive faith community that embraces the diversity of the adult population.

1. Offering a diversity of faith forming activities tailored to each season of adulthood: learning the tradition, Bible study, spiritual practices and disciplines, celebrating rituals and the church seasons, retreat experiences, and more.
2. Engaging adults in service to the poor and vulnerable, justice and advocacy, and care for creation—locally and globally—in a variety of timeframes (occasional, full day, weeklong).
3. Developing processes for identifying the gifts and strengths of adults, and equipping adults for ministry within the faith community and in mission to the world.
4. Equipping adults for ministry in the faith community and mission in the world.
5. Offering worship experiences responsive to the seasons of adulthood and to the religious and spiritual lives of adults; responsive to the cultures and languages in the faith community; and offered in different times and spaces.

6. Preparing adults who are active in the faith community for outreach to uninterested and unaffiliated, and developing their skills for faith sharing and mentoring.
7. Engaging adults in whole-church experiences for all generations that build relationships and nurture faith: worship, church year seasons, community gatherings, service to the community.
8. Creating intergenerational experiences that develop relationships across generations, provide opportunities for mentoring younger generations, engaging adults in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.
9. Developing mentoring opportunities across the faith community: younger to older, older to younger, mentors for newly married couples and new parents, career mentors for young adults, spiritual guides for prayer and spiritual direction, and more.
10. Supporting adults in the many transitions and milestones of adulthood and bringing a faith perspective to the transitions and milestones; ritualizing these milestones within the faith community, at home, and with peers.
11. Equipping the grandparent generation with knowledge, skills, and resources for faith forming activities within their families, especially with their grandchildren.
12. Developing marriage preparation that addresses marriage life-skills (communication, problem-solving), household life skills (budgeting, roles), and spiritual and faith enrichment.
13. Offering marriage enrichment throughout life that addresses knowledge and skills appropriate to that stage of life and spiritual and faith enrichment.
14. Partnering with other churches, synagogues, and mosques to help adults learn how to live in a more diverse world and understand the diverse religious traditions in their community.

Scenario 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Interested Adults & Diversity-Resisting Communities

Emphasis: Connecting adults in each season of adulthood who want to grow spiritually with a variety of faith formation experiences in physical locations in the wider community and online communities and resource centers in a faith community that is not supportive of responding to the diversity in the adult population.

1. Connecting adults to opportunities for spiritual growth, service to others, Scripture enrichment, and more in venues outside the faith community—such as in online communities and resource centers, house churches, movements, social justice organizations—and partnering with other churches to provide a variety of programming for spiritually interested adults.
2. Hosting and conducting adult programming in community settings (cafes, pubs).
3. Partnering with local and national organizations to provide opportunities for adults to engage in service to the poor and vulnerable, justice and advocacy, and care for creation.
4. Developing processes for identifying the gifts and strengths of adults who are active in the faith community and utilizing them in ministry within the church and in mission to the world.
5. Developing mentoring opportunities across the faith community: younger to older, older to younger, mentors for newly married couples and new parents, career mentors for young adults, spiritual guides for prayer and spiritual direction, and more.

6. Supporting adults in the many transitions and milestones of adulthood and bringing a faith perspective to the transitions and milestones through online communities and resources, and ritualizing milestones and transitions at home and with peers.
7. Equipping the grandparent generation, who are engaged in the faith community, with knowledge, skills, and resources for faith forming activities within their families, especially with their grandchildren, through online resources and programs/activities in other churches.
8. Developing marriage preparation that addresses marriage life-skills (communication, problem-solving), household life skills (budgeting, roles), and spiritual and faith enrichment using online resources, mentors from the faith community, and resources and programs from other churches and religious organizations.
9. Offering marriage enrichment throughout life that addresses knowledge and skills appropriate to that stage of life and spiritual and faith enrichment using online resources, mentoring, and resources and programs from other churches and religious organizations.
10. Utilizing intergenerational church events – where all the generations are already gathered – to develop relationships across generations and engage adults in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.

Scenario 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches. In light of this many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Uninterested Adults & Diversity-Resisting Communities

Emphasis: Connecting with adults who are not interested in the spiritual life in a faith community that is not supportive of efforts to respond to the diversity in the adult population.

1. Equipping the grandparent generation, who are active in the faith community, with knowledge, skills, and resources for faith forming activities within their families, especially with their grandchildren.
2. Equipping adults who are active in the faith community to engage in outreach, relationship building, and witness with adults at work and in the community.
3. Using existing children and teen programming as opportunities to connect with parents (such as vacation Bible school and youth mission trips) and explore possibilities for offering programming around their needs as parents and their adult spiritual journeys (online or in other safe, conducive settings).
4. Utilizing social media, especially Facebook, to connect with adults; providing a variety of links to online communities and resources relevant to adult life issues and spiritual needs.
5. Developing a digital platform to provide online resources, programming, and experiences for adults for adults to use individually and at home.
6. Partnering with churches and organizations to offer community-wide adult programming, such as life skills, arts, music, counseling, marriage enrichment, family enrichment, and more.
7. Partnering with other churches to host and conduct adult programming in community settings (cafes, pubs).
8. Partnering with local and national organizations to provide opportunities for adults to engage in service to the poor and vulnerable, justice and advocacy, and care for creation.

9. Supporting adults in the many transitions and milestones of adulthood, creating educational programs and small groups around life transitions, and bringing a faith perspective to the transitions and milestones.
 10. Utilizing intergenerational church events – where all the generations are already gathered – to develop relationships across generations and engage adults in shared learning, service, and worship experiences with the whole community.
 11. Organizing small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to spirituality-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
- (See Scenario 4 for additional ideas to reach spirituality uninterested adults.)

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

Faith Formation Strategies for Spiritually Uninterested Adults & Diversity-Embracing Communities

Emphasis: Engaging a supportive community in missional outreach with pathways for spiritual growth and community engagement, and in providing life-centered faith formation experiences in physical and online spaces that connect with adults who are not interested in the spiritual life.

1. Engaging in missional outreach to adults who are uninterested and unaffiliated by making connections in person and online, building relationships, and engaging with adults in hospitable environments for conversation.
2. Developing 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—helping move people from discovery to exploration to commitment—such as “Introduction to the Christian faith” program that is an opportunity for people to investigate the claims of the Christian faith in an informal, no pressure, nonjudgmental, and friendly environment that emphasizes exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal setting.
3. Offering an apprenticeship in discipleship process for adults who want to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian way of life—helping them understand who God is, what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to live in the Christian community—with one-on-one mentoring, small group sharing, personal study, prayer, and retreat experiences.
4. Developing community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
5. Creating a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page (and other social media) to connect with people.
6. Connecting with people’s life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
7. Connecting with people during transitions and milestones (marriage, birth of a baby, job transitions, divorce, retirements, funerals, and more), bringing a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing, and providing opportunities for ritualizing the milestones.
8. Developing high quality, relationship-building events designed to draw people from the wider community into relationships with people from your church such as social events, concerts, service projects, cultural festivals, arts festivals, and more.

9. Organizing small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to faith-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
10. Sponsoring community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips that are open to everyone so that people from the wider community can participate, interact with church members, and come into contact with the Christian faith in action.
11. Creating digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars, video-streaming presentations, and more
12. Honoring and celebrating cultural diversity in all aspects of church life; and providing opportunities for learning, faith growth, and worship in the languages of the people of the community.
13. Partnering with other churches, synagogues, and mosques to help adults learn how to live in a more diverse world and understand the diverse religious traditions in their community.

The Future of Adult Formation Scenarios

Response of Faith Communities to the Increasing Diversity in Society

Embracing Diversity

Scenario 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

Scenario 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually

Desire & Interest of Adults in Developing their Spiritual Life

Decreasing

Increasing

Scenario 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches. In light of this many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Scenario 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood—young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

Resisting Diversity